

Arab countries advise PNA to reconsider May 4 declaration

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Some Arab countries are advising the Palestinians to delay a May 4 declaration of statehood, to keep Benjamin Netanyahu from using it as a card in the Israeli elections, a senior Palestinian official said Sunday. Israeli elections are scheduled for May 17. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has indicated he would declare statehood by May 4 — a deadline for a permanent Israeli-Palestinian peace accord set by the 1993 Oslo accords. A unilateral declaration of statehood could give the Israeli prime minister a boost over his dovish challengers. The Palestinian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Egypt and Jordan have advised Arafat to consider the advantage such a declaration would give Netanyahu in the elections.

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King receives cable from King Hassan

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Sunday received a cable from King Hassan of Morocco congratulating him on the success of his treatment at Mayo Clinic and his full recovery. "We have been overwhelmed with joy over the delightful news which HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, had announced to the Jordanian people and to the world at large upon your discharge from hospital," King Hassan said in the cable. He wished King Hussein a safe return home and the Jordanian people further progress and prosperity.

Regent hosts iftar

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Sunday hosted an iftar banquet at Al Hussein Youth City for senior officers of the Armed Forces, the Public Security Department (PSD), the General Intelligence Department, the Civil Defence Department (CDD) and retired servicemen. Attending the banquet were Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Senate President Zeid Rifai, Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Majali, Royal Court Chief Jawad Anani, Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid, HRH Prince Faisal, His Majesty King Hussein's Adviser Salah Abu Zeid, King Hussein's Military Adviser Hameidi Al Fayed, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Miral, Kaabneh, PSD Director Nasouh Muhieddin, CDD Director Theeb Ma'ni as well as other armed forces officers. Prince Hassan and his audience performed the Maghrib prayers.

Computer and gun stolen from top Mossad officer

TEL AVIV (AP) — Police have arrested a man suspected in the theft of a computer and a gun from a top official in Israel's Mossad intelligence agency. Police spokeswoman Ety Greenberg said Sunday that Stanislav Ostrovsky was arrested last week on suspicion of burglarizing deputy Mossad director Amiram Levine's Tel Aviv home last November. Ostrovsky raised suspicions when he failed to return to prison from a furlough from his seven-year sentence for burglary. Israel Radio suggested that Ostrovsky may have been trying to steal Levine's computer files for sale to another country.

EgyptAir jet makes emergency landing after bird strike

CAIRO (AFP) — A bird smashed the flight deck windshield of an EgyptAir airliner with 33 people aboard, forcing the plane to make an emergency landing in Dubai, airport officials said Sunday. The Airbus 340, en route to Sydney on Saturday, landed in Dubai without further incident and no one on board was injured, they said. Passengers were then faced with a 24-hour delay after EgyptAir service staff brought the wrong type of replacement glass to the airport.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالإنجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الراي»

Saddam says Iraq to fight violations of no-fly zones

BAGHDAD (AP) — President Saddam Hussein said Sunday the "no-fly zones" imposed on his country have no basis in international law and vowed that Iraq will fight violations of its airspace "with all its courage and bravery."

Saddam's remarks to his cabinet were his first comments on the no-fly zones since top officials said last month that Iraq would fire on Western warplanes patrolling the areas. The comments appeared to be aimed at stoking Arab anger against the United States and Britain, which launched four days of airstrikes against Iraq in mid-December.

Protesters took to the streets in several Arab capitals after the air raids, but

Arab states have taken little action to support Iraq.

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen met this weekend in Egypt to discuss a planned Arab League meeting that is expected to formulate the group's stand on the airstrikes.

Saddam said the no-fly zones are "not only a stark

violation of international laws and norms, especially those of the United Nations, but a stark violation of Security Council resolutions themselves." His remarks were carried by the official Iraqi News Agency and later read on Iraqi television.

The no-fly zones, which cover about two-thirds of Iraq, were set up by the United States, Britain and France after the 1991 Gulf War to allegedly stop Iraq from using its air force against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq and Shiite Muslims in the south.

The no-fly zones are not sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council.

"What they are violating... is the will of the Arab Nation and the will of the Iraqi people... which is determined to fight back with all its courage and bravery," Saddam said.

Saddam also sought to cast doubt on U.S. claims that its planes were firing back when they aimed missiles and bombs at Iraqi anti-aircraft batteries in two recent clashes.

U.N. in talks to keep staff in Iraq — see page 12

(Continued on page 12)



Iraqi women wait outside a government office at Baghdad's district Al Askan to receive coupons for their annual purchase of food and medicine on Sunday. Iraq introduced a rationing system after the Gulf War to offset the suffering caused by the rapid increase in foodstuff prices and to distribute the goods which the country bought under an "oil-for-food" deal which allows Iraq to export a limited amount of oil every six months to buy food, medicines and other relief goods (Reuters photo)

Khatib visit to Kuwait to end strain in ties

AMMAN (J.T.) — Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Al Khatib has received an invitation from his Kuwaiti counterpart, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, to visit the Gulf emirate, but no date was yet set for the visit.

Khatib said he received a message from Sheikh Sabah inviting him to visit Kuwait and offering congratulations on the King's full recovery from lymphoma and wishing him a safe return home.

In earlier statements in Kuwait Sunday, Sheikh Sabah was quoted by news agencies as saying the visit would officially end the eight-year strain in ties between the two Arab countries.

He told reporters that he had extended the invitation to his Jordanian counterpart.

He did not say when the Jordanian minister would make the visit.

Ties between Kuwait and Jordan soured during the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis because of Amman's perceived tilt toward Iraq that invaded Kuwait and occupied it for seven months before its troops were evicted by a U.S.-led coalition.

Relations began warming up gradually in 1995 when Jordan distanced itself from Baghdad and called for political change in Iraq.

In June, former planning minister Rima Khalaf became the first cabinet member to visit the oil-rich state after the crisis.

Asked when the Jordanian embassy will reopen in Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah said: "When he [Khatib] comes to Kuwait, everything will be over."

The embassy has been closed since the crisis, but Kuwait's diplomatic mission in Amman remained open, headed by a charge d'affaires.

Six Lebanese civilians wounded in Israeli air raid

BAALBEK (AP) — Israeli warplanes attacked suspected resistance movement positions deep inside Lebanon on Sunday, wounding six people, Lebanese security officials said.

The officials said the victims included a Lebanese woman and four daughters.

The Lebanese militia Hizbollah has often fired katyusha rockets at northern Israel to retaliate for Israeli strikes in which Lebanese civilians are wounded.

Hizbollah's deputy leader, Sheikh Naim Kasseib, threatened to revenge Sunday's raid.

"We reserve our right to retaliate in the appropriate way, time and place," he said.

In Tel Aviv, the Israeli army said in a statement that its jets attacked guerrilla "infrastructure targets," including a training base used by Hizbollah and a radio station. "Both targets were outside populated areas," the army statement said.

The Lebanese security officials said Israeli jets fired two air-to-surface missiles at Hizbollah's Voice of the Oppressed radio station near this ancient Roman city, damaging its transmitter. The radio went off the air.

The four raiding jets also fired four missiles at the hills around the villages of Nabi Sheet and Janta, about 23 kilometers southeast of Baalbek, they said. They spoke on customary condition of

anonymity.

The officials said the mother, identified as 55-year-old Hamdah Ayyoub, was wounded during the raid on Janta along with four daughters. Witnesses said they were not badly hurt.

Ayyoub's husband, Ahmad, 60, told reporters that his wife and daughters were wounded by shrapnel from a missile that fell 50 metres from their house.

He said the house was badly damaged. Ahmad Ayyoub said he was not at home at the time of the attack.

A man was wounded in the same raid, the officials said. The Christian Voice of Lebanon radio station said he was a Syrian soldier.

Anti-aircraft gunners of the

Lebanese army and the Iranian-backed Hizbollah guerrilla group fired at the jets but apparently did not hit them, the officials said.

It was the second Israeli attack on Janta in less than two weeks.

On Dec. 22, Israeli warplanes struck suspected guerrilla bases there, killing a Lebanese woman and six of her children.

Hizbollah, retaliated with a barrage of katyusha rockets into northern Israel that injured one person.

Fifteen others were treated for shock.

Sunday's air raid came a day after Hizbollah's secretary-general, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, warned that his group would bombard north-

ern Israel with rockets again if the Jewish state carried out its threat to attack deep inside Lebanon.

"The situation is open to all possibilities," he told the Associated Press in an interview Saturday.

"Our katyusha rockets are always ready," he said, referring to the Soviet-designed, surface-to-surface missiles that Hizbollah launches from southern Lebanon.

Hizbollah is leading a guerrilla war to oust some 1,500 Israeli soldiers and their allied Lebanese militiamen from an Israeli-occupied border strip in southern Lebanon.

Israeli govt receives tenders for Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Seven Israeli businessmen have put in tenders for the construction of a controversial Jewish settlement, known as Har Homa, in Arab east Jerusalem, the housing ministry said Sunday.

The ministry said work would start once the contractors have been selected in the next few weeks or months.

Ground clearing at the site in March 1997 angered Palestinians and led to a 19-month deadlock in the peace process which was only broken by October's U.S.-brokered Wye River peace agreement.

The settlement is to be built in the Jabal Abu Ghneim district on

the borders of Arab east Jerusalem and the autonomous Palestinian town of Bethlehem and is planned to contain a total of 6,000 housing units when completed.

The initial tenders are for the first stage of 1,025 units.

Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush had proposed subsidising purchases, fearing that high prices might put off potential buyers, but the ministry says this has been turned down, since it believes there will be sufficient demand for the homes.

Work was suspended in December 1997 after the infrastructure had been laid, but the government issued advertise-

ments calling for tenders for the construction in November.

The Palestinians say the invitation of tenders was a breach of the Wye agreement under which each side promised not to undertake any unilateral action which could "change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." But Israel insists the provision does not apply to Arab east Jerusalem which it regards as part of its "eternal undivided capital."

The international community has never recognised Israel's annexation of the city's Arab eastern sector which it occupied in 1967.

Europe poised for euro debut on financial markets

BERLIN (AP) — After days of slaving round the clock, banks and financial institutions across Europe were ready Sunday for the debut of the new common currency — or euro — on financial markets.

The stroke of midnight New Year's Eve brought the long-anticipated fusion of 11 European currencies into one. But the true test of the currency launch happens Monday, the euro's first day of business.

While preparations for the euro started in 1996, fine-tuning had to wait until after the exchange rate was set. That happened Thursday, leaving financial institutions just four days to adjust software and convert stock papers and bank accounts into euros.

By Sunday evening, the job was done. From its skyscraper headquarters in Frankfurt, the European Central Bank — ground zero for euro monetary policy — declared the weekend changeover a success.

ECB monitors found no glitches in preparations at any of the national banks or key financial institutions of the euro nations: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

"Preparations have gone well," said Heering Lighthart, president of the Association Cambiste Internationale, the international foreign exchange dealers association in Luxembourg.

Still, he said, most banks will be very nervous about putting the systems under too much pressure, reluctant to find that they or their business partners were not fully prepared.

"People will start very slowly," he predicted, suggesting trading won't reach full speed for some days.

Euro coins and bills will not enter cash registers and purses for another three years. On paper, though, the euro is now the main European currency for electronic transfers, checks and credit card payments. German stores, for example, will advertise products in marks and euros until the currency hits the streets, giving customers the option to pay in either.

The first known electronic transaction happened one second into 1999, when a man in Frankfurt used a credit card to buy champagne. And while international trading of the euro started Sunday in Australia at 1600 GMT, the euro's debut was not expected to begin in earnest until the opening of European markets.

(Continued on page 12)

Iraq steps up vitriolic attacks on Mubarak

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq launched its third day of vitriolic attacks Sunday on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, accusing him of delaying an Arab summit at which Baghdad hoped to win strong backing.

"Mubarak is playing the same role of conspirator as he did in 1990," said the Babel newspaper, run by the Iraqi president's eldest son, Uday Saddam Hussein.

In 1990-91, Iraq pointed a finger at Mubarak over Egypt's involvement in "Operation Desert Storm," the U.S.-led multinational campaign that ejected occupying Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

The newspaper published Sunday a caricature of an Iraqi throwing a shoe at Mubarak, who is being supported by an Israeli.

The Al Musawer Al Arabi weekly depicted Mubarak as a horse, with U.S. President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seated on the saddle.

His tongue hanging out.

Mubarak is drooling over the dollar bills U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is throwing in his face.

"Here is the true face of the Egyptian government: Hosni, the American and Israeli mount," the cartoon's caption read.

On Saturday, Babel branded Mubarak an opportunist for his stand on Iraq.

"Hosni is well known for his opportunism and his hypocrisy in the political field," the influential newspaper said.

The daily published a caricature of the Egyptian president as a belly dancer performing for Clinton, Albright and Netanyahu, while Gulf leaders made up the band providing the music.

Mubarak, in remarks published Friday, blamed Saddam Hussein for his people's continuing plight. His reproach was the latest in a series of bitter Egyptian attacks on Iraq.

Ties between Egypt and Iraq were broken during

the 1991 Gulf War by Baghdad. But 1998 saw a thaw which included a visit by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to Cairo.

The Iraqi ministers of trade and health were also in Egypt, and Egyptian exports to Iraq went up to \$250 million.

But the war of words between the two started just 48 hours after the first U.S. and British missile strikes last month, when Aziz implicitly criticised Egypt and Saudi Arabia for having merely "expressed regret and concern."

Aziz stepped up his rhetoric on Tuesday, after Mubarak's pointed criticism of the Baghdad regime, calling the Egyptian president a lapdog of the United States.

"No honest and reasonable person in Egypt, the Arab World and in the world can share the comments of Mr. Mubarak who has adopted the U.S. policy of double standards," he wrote in the Al Jumhuriya daily.

Israeli guard held for threat to Barak

KIRYAT SHMONA (R) — Israeli police detained an airport security guard suspected of calling for the killing of opposition leader Ehud Barak while awaiting the politician's arrival on Sunday on an election campaign visit.

Yair Ben-Abou, 26, told reporters he did not mean to threaten Barak. Police quoted him as saying: "All the Ashkenazim and 'highbrows' must be murdered and also Ehud Barak."

Ashkenazim are Jews of European origin. Police asked a magistrate to allow them to hold him for a few days for further questioning. Three years ago a right-wing Jew opposed to returning Israeli-occupied land to Palestinians assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a predecessor of Barak's as leader of Israel's Labour party. "Clearly given the background with which we are all familiar, everything must be checked seriously and that's what we are doing," Avi Tiller, commander of the Galilee police district, told Israel Radio.

The privately hired armed guard, working at Kiryat Shmona airport in northern Israel, was overheard by a Shin Bet secret service man telling another security guard that Barak should be killed, police said. "What I said was from my standpoint an unfortunate mistake, an unfortunate slip of the tongue. I had no intention — I don't stand behind these things and that's it. I am very sorry and express regret," Ben-Abou told reporters.



Asian Muslims break their fast at a mosque in Sharjah on Sunday. Mosques offer mass meals for poorer people during the holy month (AFP photo)

'Sharon snubbed by Albright'

TEL AVIV (R) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has refused to meet Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon when he travels to the United States this week. Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported on Sunday.

Sharon's spokesman, Raanan Gissin, refused to confirm or deny the report that Albright, upset over Israel's suspension of an interim peace deal with the Palestinians, had snubbed a request to discuss with Sharon ideas for a final peace accord.

A senior source in Sharon's office denied there had been any request to meet Albright. "We did not ask for any special meetings," the source, who declined to be identified, said. "There was no snub."

Sharon's office said in a statement U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross would meet the foreign minister when Sharon is in New York

to deliver a regular briefing to Israel's senior diplomatic corps in the United States and Canada.

Ross is expected to visit the region next week to try to put the U.S.-brokered accord back on track.

"It is customary that a visit by Israel's minister of foreign affairs is brought to the attention of the State Department in the United States," the statement said.

"The State Department has notified Israel's embassy in Washington that Mr. Dennis Ross, Special Middle East Coordinator, will come to New York to meet Foreign Minister Sharon," it said.

The Israeli cabinet last month froze implementation of the Wye River peace accord over alleged Palestinian violations of the land-for-security deal and linked progress to a string of conditions not included in the agreement.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Israel used outdated data in attack'

TEL AVIV (R) — An Israeli inquiry into the killing of a Lebanese woman and six of her children in a botched Israeli air raid found faulty intelligence data largely to blame for the incident, the daily Maariv reported on Sunday. The newspaper said intelligence pictures of the site where the woman and her children were killed in their house on Dec. 22, 1998, were outdated, having been taken some three years ago. It also found the raid was held up by several hours pending permission, which affected outside lighting and may have skewed the pilot's judgement.

'Yemen can't join Commonwealth'

LONDON (AFP) — Yemen, which is facing tough questioning over the deaths of four kidnapped tourists after a bloody rescue operation, will fail in its bid to join the Commonwealth, a British minister was reported Sunday to have said. Foreign Office junior minister Tony Lloyd has confirmed that Yemen's recent application to join the 54-nation body would be turned down because it does not meet the entry criteria on good governance. The Observer reported. "Clearly at the moment there are some issues that have to be resolved," Lloyd was quoted as telling the newspaper. Yemen's application was first considered at the 1997 Commonwealth heads of government summit in Scotland.

Japan to try revive Syrian-Israeli talks

DAMASCUS (R) — Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura will visit Syria this week for talks on ways to revive Syrian-Israeli peace talks which broke off some three years ago, officials said on Sunday. A Japanese embassy spokesman told Reuters that Komura, who will also visit Israel as part of a regional tour, would hold talks with President Hafez Al Assad and Foreign Minister Farouq Al Shara. His visit starts on Friday. "The talks will focus on the latest developments of the Middle East peace process and ways of resuming the Syrian-Israeli peace talks," the spokesman said.

Bodies of hostages arrive in Britain

LONDON (AP) — The bodies of three British tourists and an Australian killed during a shootout between Yemeni troops and a gang of kidnappers arrived in Britain late Saturday. Britons Margaret Whitehouse, 52, Ruth Williamson, 34, and Peter Rowe, 60, and Australian Andrew Thirsk, 35, died when the Yemeni authorities launched a rescue operation Tuesday after the kidnapping of 16 Western tourists by Islamic extremists. Amid confusion over who fired first and British government concerns over some of the aspects of how the operation was handled, U.S. security experts and British detectives from Scotland Yard arrived in Yemen late Friday to investigate the deaths.

'Oil exports limited to \$3 billion'

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq on Sunday said it would not be able to export more than \$3 billion worth of crude in the fifth six-month phase of the U.N. oil-for-food programme.

"Because of its export capacities and the low oil prices, Iraq will not be able to export more than \$3 billion worth of oil," Saddam Zaban Al Hassan, chairman of the State Organisation for Marketing of Oil (Somo), told the Al Musawer Al Arabi newspaper.

This is \$2.2 billion less than the ceiling set under the programme's latest

phase which began in late November. The programme is an exemption from the sweeping sanctions imposed following Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait which allows it to sell limited quantities of crude to pay for imports of basic products.

The United Nations has said \$3.04 billion was raised in the programme's fourth phase, although one third of this went to pay reparations to Kuwait and to fund U.N. operations in Iraq.

Iraq has struggled to reach the \$5.2 billion ceiling because it has not been able

to repair its battered oil industry, hit by the 1991 Gulf war and eight years of U.N. sanctions.

Iraq is allowed to buy some spare parts for its oil industry, but U.N. approval of these contracts has been slow.

Hassan said that by the end of December Iraq had received only a small fraction of one spare parts contract out of a total of 238. The oil chief also said 63 oil sale contracts had been signed with foreign firms since the start of the fifth phase, all of which have received U.N. approval.

Netanyahu ally forms party ahead of elections

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu's longtime ally Avigdor Lieberman launched a new party on Sunday, aiming to rally the support of Russian-speaking Israelis around the prime minister ahead of May elections.

But political analysts differed on whether his Yisrael Baitanu party — Hebrew for "Israel is Our Home" — would help or hurt Netanyahu.

Michael Eitan, a loyalist in Netanyahu's Likud Party, predicted Lieberman, who was instrumental in solidifying Netanyahu's control over Likud, would hurt the party by taking votes away in the May 17 elections.

Promising a social revolution, Lieberman, who immigrated to

Israel 20 years ago, told a news conference: "I intend to act with all of my power so that Benjamin Netanyahu is elected prime minister."

But Lieberman, formerly Netanyahu's chief of staff and a fellow survivor of a corruption scandal which ensnared them both, immediately ignited a public row by vowing to topple the "police state" he said Israel had become.

His opening salvo — an attack on police, state prosecutors and Israel's Supreme Court — prompted an outpouring of criticism across the political spectrum.

Netanyahu's office issued a statement saying Lieberman

spoke for himself alone.

"I was opposed to the formation of this list. I felt there is no room for more lists. It only increases the fragmentation in the public," Netanyahu told reporters. Lieberman helped to chart Netanyahu's meteoric rise to power but failed as chief of staff to stop the Israeli leader from lurching from crisis to crisis.

When prosecutors finally closed the case against him in 1997 in connection with the short-lived appointment of a new attorney-general, they said suspicions lingered that he had had a role in the scandal.

He resigned the chief-of-staff job two months later. At his Tel Aviv news confer-

ence, Lieberman alleged that police had brought charges against three Israeli politicians not for suspected crimes but because of their political stances.

"When I say we've become a police state, I mean it. When I say I have no faith in the justice system and law enforcement in the state of Israel, I mean it. We need police who look for the murderers and rapists and not the newspaper headlines," he said.

Lieberman's party could loosen the grip of former Soviet Jewish dissident, Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, on the one in every six Israelis who hail from the former Soviet Union.

Buoyed by hundreds of thousands of immigrants arriving

since 1989, Sharansky's Yisrael ba-Aliya party — "Israel of Immigration" — came out of nowhere in 1996 national elections with the clout to make or break Netanyahu's government.

Israel's parliament is due to give final approval on Monday to advancing elections planned for 2000 to May 17, 1999. The vote was precipitated by splits in Netanyahu's rightist coalition over a land-for-security peace deal with Palestinians.

While still an aide to Netanyahu, Lieberman — an opponent of ceding West Bank land — was quoted in 1997 as saying he opposed Israel's "sucking up" to Arabs.

JORDAN TELEVISION

TEL 73111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Cartoon — Batman
15:30 Children drama — David Copper Field
16:00 Des Chiffres Et Des Lettres
16:30 Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1
17:00 Thalassa
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News headlines
19:33 The Parenthood
20:00 Doc. — Islamic Heritage and Art
20:30 Drama — Big Sky
21:30 Encounter
22:00 News in English
22:30 Drama — The Fix
23:30 Comedy — Perfect Stranger
23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:55 Fajr
05:10 (Sunrise) Duha
11:40 Dhuhur
14:26 'Asr
16:49 Maghreb
18:11 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614150
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
Madaba Tel. 06/19
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be moderate, warm, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min/Max temp. Amman04/18 Aqaba11/23 Deserts02/19 Jordan Valley11/23

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17 Aqaba 23 Humidity readings: Amman 29 per cent, Aqaba 28 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun05/13 Jerash06/17 Um Qays07/18 Madaba06/19 Petra05/18 Dead Sea12/26

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN: Dr. Yahya Abdul Rahim4126072 Dr. Khalil Tushaq4757253 Dr. Bahjat Bader5326642 Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5390432

AMMAN: Firas Pharmacy5661912

AL SALAM Pharmacy4636730 Mayadah Pharmacy5537004 Ruin Al Dawa Pharmacy5536169

IRBID: Dr. Issam Salih02/245209 Fou'ad Pharmacy02/275360

ZARQA: Dr. Tareq Hijawi09/985445 Palestine Pharmacy09/983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111 Civil Defence Department5661111 Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341 Civil Defence Emergency199

Rescue Police192, 4621111, 4637777 Fire Brigade4617101 Blood Bank4775121 Highway Police5343402 Traffic Police4896390 Public Security Dept.4630321 Hotel Complaints5605800 Price Complaints5661176 Water & Sewerage Complaints4897467 Amman Municipality Complaints4771111

Telephone Information (directory assistance)121 Overseas Calls0132 Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101 Jordan Television4773111 Radio Jordan4774111 Water Authority5680100 J. Electricity Authority5815615

Electric4636381 Power Co.4636381 RJ Flight Information44-53200 Queen Alia Int. Airport44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199 The Islamic, Abdli5665131/7 Hussein Medical Centre5856856 Luznla4630195 Khalidi Maternity464241/6 Akileh Maternity464241/2 Jabal Amman Maternity4642362 Malhas, J. Amman4636140 Palestine, Shreicani5607071

Stmeisani Hospital5607431 Jordan Hospital5607550 University Hospital5353444 Al-Muasher Hospital56672719 Al-Ahli, Abdali5664164/6 Italian, Al-Muhajreen4771101/3 Al-Bashir4775112/6 Army, Marka4891611/15 Queen Alia Hospital5157100 Aral Hospital5607155 Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA: Zarqa Govt. Hospital09/983323 Zarqa National Hospital09/990560 Ibn Sina Hospital09/986731 Al Hikma Modern Hospital09/990990

IRBID: Princess Basma Hospital02/275555

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:30Damascus (RJ)
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
08:50Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
09:15Sanaa (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
16:20Cairo (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
16:45New York, Amsterdam (RJ)

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

06:30Beirut (RJ)
10:30Wahran (add) (RJ)
11:00Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:15Frankfurt, London (RJ)
11:45Rome (add) (RJ)
12:05Kuwait (RJ)
12:30Cairo (RJ)
20:15Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:45Abu Dhabi, Tehran (RJ)
21:15Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
21:20Damascus (RJ)
22:00 Jeddah (two additional flights) (RJ)
22:40Tel Aviv (add) (RJ)
22:45Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights

06:00Istanbul (TK)
07:25Paris (AF)
09:05London (BA)
10:30Cairo (MS)
11:05Istanbul (SD)
14:10Bahrain (GF)
15:30Vienna (OS)
15:25Dubai, Abu Dhabi (EK)
17:30Istanbul (SD)
18:40Beirut (ME)
19:15Frankfurt (LH)
22:25Tel Aviv (LY)
01:25Amsterdam (KL)
01:25Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW)

09:30Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:10 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
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Police charge married couple with six counts of murder

AMMAN (J.T.) — A man and his wife are in custody in Amman facing charges of murder in six cases involving the death of seven people: two men, four women and a six-month-old child.

The Director of Amman Police Department Hisham Ezzor, who announced the arrest of Bilal Mohammad and Susan Ibrahim, said the couple had committed the crimes in Amman and Zarqa over the past four years and have confessed to the murders which they said were committed in the course of robbery.

According to Brigadier Ezzor, the two suspects fled to Libya after allegedly committing the crimes and robbing their victims of their jewellery and cash, but were turned over to the Jordanian authorities on Dec. 13, 1998 after having been contacted.

He said that the suspects used to enter the homes of their victims by claiming that they represented a tourist agency. They then stabbed their victims and slashed their throats before robbing their homes.

Ezzor said that the first of these crimes were reported in December of 1994. The first victim was a woman resident of Al Rashid Housing Estate. The second occurred on March 27 of 1995, and the victims were a woman and her child living in Shmeisani. The third murder was reported in March of 1997 and the victim was found along the Italian Hospital Street in downtown Amman, while the fourth was reported in March of 1998. The fourth victim was a woman found dead in her Hashemi Shamali home. The fifth crime was reported in May of 1998; the victim was a woman living

in the University of Jordan's Housing Estate. The sixth was reported in May of 1998 and the victim was an elderly man living in Ajawan district of Zarqa.

Ezzor pointed out that the murders were all committed during the morning hours when most men are at work rather than at home.

According to Ezzor, thorough and continued investigations into the murders led the police to suspect Mohammad, who was employed by a marketing agency, and Ibrahim, who allegedly abetted him in his murders.

Fearing arrest, the two married and fled the country in September of 1998, travelling first to Egypt and later to Libya where they settled until Jordanian authorities contacted the Libyan authorities to commence extradition procedures.

according to Ezzor.

He said that the Libyans arrested the couple on Oct. 21, 1998 upon Jordan's request, and the Public Security Department in Jordan despatched Major Hassan Ensour and Major Jamal Bedour to fetch the suspects from Libya. They brought the suspects to Amman on Dec. 13, 1998.

Faced with evidence collected through the investigations, the couple confessed to the crimes saying that they were committed in the course of robbery. According to Ezzor, the police have retrieved some of the stolen property.

The criminal court's public prosecutor Ghaleb Rababa'a is supervising the investigation of the suspects who are now held at Jweidat prison awaiting trial.

Farmers Federation employees to be paid this week

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — Forty-seven employees at the National Committee of the Jordan Farmers Federation, Jordan Valley Branch, are going to be paid "around this week," after a four-month wait, said Minister of Agriculture Mijehi Khreisha.

The Jordan Valley Branch employees have not received their wages since August 1998 due to the national committee's financial problems.

The government used to grant the National Committee of the Jordan Farmers Federation JD250,000 yearly — an amount raised by several associations such as the Jordan Agricultural Credit Organisation and the Ministry of Finance, said Khreisha.

"Since the beginning of January, the National Committee of the Jordan Farmers Federation is going to be funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Jordan Valley Authority and organisations that used to grant funds to farmers," Khreisha explained.

Forty-nine employees from the Jordan Valley Branch were re-employed in other government organisations in order to "reduce the committee's financial expenses."

Khreisha indicated that the employees were not laid off or dismissed because "we need them and they are well experienced and have been working with us for years."

Khreisha told the Jordan Times that the delay in the payment of salaries was discussed with Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh and Finance Minister Michel Maro. As a result, it was agreed to allocate to the committee all the money needed for its expenses, including the JD60,000 accumulated wages.

Mulki postpones Baghdad trip

By Mohammed Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Minister of Energy Hani Mulki has postponed his long overdue visit to Iraq to renew an annual deal between the two countries because of the recent gas problem which left many Jordanians in state of confusion.

"The crisis has been over since Thursday, but people are buying more [gas cylinders] than they need which has complicated the problem," Mulki told the Jordan Times.

Mulki was earlier forced to postpone his visit to Iraq due to the American-led air strikes late last month, and it is not clear when the visit will be rescheduled.

Iraq is the prime source of Jordan's petroleum.

"I postponed my visit to Iraq to supervise the distribution of the gas shipment coming on Wednesday," said Mulki.

The Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company is expected on Wednesday to receive 40 tonnes of liquefied gas from Greece.

Abdul Wahab Zu'bi, general manager of the refinery, attributed the problem to an unexpected delay of the gas shipment from Greece.

"The air strikes against Iraq also delayed an overdue gas shipment from Baghdad," said Zu'bi.

Mulki expects the country's shortage to be relieved by Wednesday after the shipment of liquefied gas docks the port of Aqaba. "The shipment will definitely be enough to provide the local market with its needs," added Mulki.

The refinery is planning to expand the storage capacity of gas stations around the Kingdom to avoid a similar incident in the future.

"The company has floated a tender to double the storage capacity of gas stations around the country." There are three gas stations in Jordan, in Amman, Zarqa and Irbid.

The tender is expected to be placed by the end of this month, said Zu'bi.

According to Zu'bi, Jordan consumes around 100,000 gas cylinders a day.

The company earlier announced that gas stations were working round the clock to meet the market's rising demands.

However, people are still rushing to gas stations in order to replace their empty cylinders with full ones.

"As soon as I break my fasting I rush to the gas station agency to buy gas," said Hassan Kamel, 27. Many Jordanians refrain from food and beverage from sunrise to sunset during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Mohammed Omar, 40, said he had to "bribe" a young boy by giving him one dinar to find him a gas cylinder.

"The boy rounded Al Hussein Camp and Jabal Al Hussein suburb for two days till he found me an empty cylinder," said Mohammed.

"I have enough things to worry about other than searching the country for a gas cylinder," complained Ahmad Kamel, a schoolteacher who earns JD150 a month. "It is so humiliating."

what's going on

- FILMS**
- "La Belle et la Bête" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh at 8:30 p.m.
 - "The Rock" at Books @ Café, Jabal Amman on Tuesday Jan. 5 at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650458).
- Concert**
- Musical performance entitled "May God Protect Al Hussein" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.
- RAMADAN EVENING**
- Ramadan evening at the American Center, Abdoun at 7:30 p.m. (The evening will feature poetry and percussion by Arab-American Poet Elmar Abinader and Percussionist Diem Jones, as well as traditional Arabic music by oud player Elia Khouri).
- EXHIBITIONS**
- Photo exhibition at the Royal Cultural Centre, until Jan. 16.
 - Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
 - Exhibition of Nabatean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).
 - "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Oufali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.
 - The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Furun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

Germany's Von Hoessle expected Wednesday

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — The director of the Near and Middle East Department at Germany's Federal Foreign Office, Ambassador Andreas Von Hoessle, is expected here late Wednesday for consultations with Jordanian officials on the stalled Middle East peace process and Iraq.

German embassy officials told the Jordan Times on Sunday that Von Hoessle is scheduled to hold talks with Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib and Planning Minister Nabil Amman during his one-and-a-half-day stay in the Kingdom.

The visit, part of a regional tour including Israel, the Palestinian self-rule areas, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, aims to assess the prospects for the peace process following Israel's decision to freeze implementation of the Oct. 23 Wye River Memorandum with the Palestinians, one German embassy source said.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last month cancelled a second West Bank troop withdrawal Israel is required to carry out under the Wye deal. The Israeli premier is insisting that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat abandon plans to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally when the interim five-year period of self-rule expires on May 4.

Von Hoessle's talks on Iraq will focus on "the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people and the need for bringing Iraq back into the peoples' community," the German official added.

Germany has diplomatically supported the U.S. and Great Britain during last month's airstrikes against Baghdad. But, under pressure from its industries and powerful business circles, Bonn has long stressed the need to lift the eight-year-old sanctions and reopen the Iraqi oil market to regional and global trade.

Minister reveals government water contingency plans

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Energy and Water Hani Mulki told Parliament Sunday that the government has made plans to face any problems that could arise in connection with water shortages in the coming summer.

The plan entails among other things drilling new water wells and replacing water distribution by truck with a special water pipe network, with the beneficiaries from this system paying the cost of this method of supply instead of paying for water trucks, according to Mulki.

In an interview with the Jordan Times published Sunday, the minister noted that the government was cracking down on the abuse of 1,654 privately-run water wells as part of efforts to combat illegal use of water pointing out that each of these wells has been pumping water for private farms at the rate of 50 to 100 cubic metres per hour.

He said that the Water

Authority last week referred to court 1,500 cases involving residents allegedly receiving water illegally either by tampering with or damaging water meters.

The minister said the government's plan includes controlling the water pumping from wells used for agricultural purposes by forcing owners to adhere to a restricted pumping quota.

At the same time, the minister pointed out, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation last week signed an \$800,000 agreement with a local firm to dig two deep wells in the Karak region in order to examine the water quality of the Disi Aquifer prior to drawing water from Amman from the Disi basin.

The minister blamed the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company for the shortage of gas cylinders that became apparent last week. Mulki said the refinery had not taken extra precautions for winter months, when a

majority of citizens rely on liquefied gas for heating, and did not take into consideration the expected rise in the consumption of gas due to the cold wave.

He said the government has now concluded contracts for the purchase of 40,000 tonnes of liquefied gas which will arrive by sea in addition to extra shipments which are due to arrive overland from Iraq, Jordan's main supplier of energy. The minister said that the first shipment of gas will be arriving on Wednesday and is expected to cover demand for 20 days.

The refinery decided last week to ration gas distribution following the sudden shortage caused by the increase in public demand for the commodity when the current cold wave started. Jordan's daily consumption of between 500 and 550 tonnes of liquefied gas during summer soared to 1,250 tonnes a day in winter.

The fight for women's rights in 1998: one step forward, one step back

Women activists see victory on the horizon in a battle for their own passports, but their fundamental right to life is still threatened by 'crimes of honour' in spite of pressure for change

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Women activists believe their quest for greater equality and empowerment scored some gains last year but they say more must be done to realise long-term goals in a conservative, male-dominated society that generally continues to snub them.

They are counting on unprecedented criticism of violence against women voiced last year by His Majesty King Hussein, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, and other Royal family members to bring about some imminent dramatic improvements.

They hope that the more liberal five-month-old government of Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, will translate into reality Royal orders stressing the need to take amendments to stem legal contradictions in current laws that are encouraging violence against women, especially crimes of honour.

Queen Noor is a constant advocate of the need to amend laws to establish clearer moral and legal definitions of what should constitute a crime of honour, and what hinders the judiciary from tough sentencing perpetrators.

An average of between 25 to 30 women are reportedly killed in Jordan every year by male relatives on suspicion of engagement in an illicit relationship — a black mark in Jordan's otherwise reasonable human rights record.

Most international human rights watchdogs have for years condemned such practices but laws that encourage such murders have not been tightened. Such crimes are not considered as pre-meditated murder and hence, offenders receive light sentences and are released after spending a few months in jail.

"Please let us remember that the honour of the whole Jordanian society is more noble than the loss of life of its generation due to rivalries of 'honour causes'," Prince Hassan said at a recent meeting with tribal leaders.

Her Royal Highness Princess Basma, chairperson of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) and the country's main champion of women rights, urged society in November to take measures to end violence against women instead of pretending the issue did not exist.

"The shame is to know that violence against women does exist and to allow all forms of suffering to happen against women," she said at the launch of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) national campaign on violence against women on Nov. 22.

Under the theme "A Life Free of Violence: It is our Right," the 16-day campaign, the first of its kind in Jordan, directly focus on the sensitive issue, included several activities including public marches denouncing such abuse as well as essay and drawing competitions

for school students.

This campaign, some activists say, helped generate rare popular awareness among school children — the leaders of the future.

And more newspaper columnists and media reports spoke of the need to end such abuse.

The highlight of the campaign was a Nov. 22 pan-Arab conference on domestic violence against women and a subsequent seminar organised by the Human Forum for Women's Rights at which several Jordanian researchers unveiled shocking studies on the extent of continued abuse against women.

"Women have become more aware of their rights," said Amal Sabbagh, secretary general of JNCW.

"And I believe that since we launched this conference on violence against women, we have succeeded in shifting the issue of violence against women from the private to the public domain."

The regional conference concluded with a list of future directions for countries of the area to undertake to help combat domestic violence — common and generally accepted in all these states.

"The conference and all the activities that were conducted in the past have created positive reactions," said Sabbagh. "There was more press coverage of the issue, the mosques tackled the issue in the Friday prayers and encouraged a national dialogue about domestic violence."

Female rights activists Asma Khader echoed similar views.

"Women have become more realistic and more aware and courageous in demanding their rights," she said in an interview.

"And the issue appears to have grasped the interest of officials who have become more interested in women's affairs," said Khader, a lawyer who has long campaigned for improved human rights and female empowerment.

"This, I believe, will lead necessary and true change," Sabbagh pointed to a pioneer project adopted by the government last January to mainstream gender issues in 20 sectors under the 1998-2002 socio-economic development plan instead of dedicating one of its chapters to women's issues.

"I believe that this is one of the most important steps because through the development plans we can mainstream gender issues to eventually reach official areas here," she said.

Nawal Fa'ouri, an Islamic Action Front (IAF) member, said female equality in Islam occupied a large segment of last year's events which made any talk on the subject more acceptable.

"Many religious lectures tackled the issue of equality and rights which Islam has granted to women, and the need to eliminate cultural and behavioural beliefs that discriminate against women as this is always misinter-

preted by many as being related to the Islamic religion," she said.

President of the Arab Women Society Emily Naffa said efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organisations towards fighting for women's rights and equality were more visible and intense in 1998.

"Many workshops, which addressed women's concerns and needs were held and this is an indication of the increase in awareness of women's issue," Naffa said.

Jordanian women activists also launched a nationwide campaign to raise the legal age of marriage to 18 for both sexes by changing the current legislation's concerning marriage.

Current laws allow females to marry at the age of 15 and men at 16, a factor sociologists have blamed for rising divorce rates.

Despite strong resistance by some Islamist leaders and ordinary Jordanians, the potential for women to finally secure the right to obtain their own passports without the permission of their husbands or "male guardians" gained momentum last year.

However, the new draft law, which was passed by the Lower House of Parliament in July, does not necessarily mean that a woman will be able to travel without the consent of her husband or male guardian.

The amendment is awaiting endorsement by the Upper House of Parliament before a Royal Decree is issued enacting the law.

But women leaders criticised religious leaders who slammed the passport amendments on grounds they will increase the already high rates of divorce in the society "and will lead to the corruption of society through women."

They were responding to Mahmoud Shouait, the Mufti of the Armed Forces, who said in late June that granting women the right to obtain their passports is not permitted by Sharia since it would lead to women's travelling without her husband's consent.

Khader said the move was "a step forward for women's liberation."

And Fa'ouri, who wears the Moslem's traditional long robes and covers her hair with a scarf, said the amendments did not "contradict with Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence) as it is a fundamental right for women to obtain a passport as guaranteed in legal and humanitarian terms."

Similar support was aired by Sheikh Abdul Aziz Khayat and Ra'ef Najem, two former ministers of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs who said they had no objection to women obtaining their own passports. However, they insisted that women still had to obtain permission from their husbands to travel because "a woman must not travel alone, since you do not know what could happen to her on her own."

The government, together with UNIFEM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

plan to open a women's shelter, the first of its kind in the Arab World, to house women who are threatened by their families for "honour" reasons, or women who are victims of domestic abuse.

But despite these positive strides, most female activists say they are facing an uphill battle and major work is still needed to ensure women's full integration into society.

Between 40 to 50 women involved in cases of immoral behaviour remain locked up in government correctional facilities under what is termed as "protective custody," because of their suspected immoral behaviours or for committing adultery.

Naffa and Khader said existing laws still discriminate against women while their political representation in government remains minimal.

"This is something we need to work on to change," said Khader.

Both female activists pointed to an urgent need to eliminate the stereotyping of women both in school curricula and in the media.

Crimes of honour against women are continuing.

Officials said at least 25 women were reportedly killed in the Kingdom in honour crimes in 1997 — 95 per cent of them were killed based solely on suspicion of immoral behaviour.

Figures for 1998 have not been released, but officials expect them to exceed 20 such murders.

Khader and other activists believe women organisations and the JNCW should step up efforts to speed up amendments to legislation which discriminate against women.

Article 340 of the Penal Code reduces or exempts the penalty against any person who kills a female relative who commits adultery or is found in an adulterous situation — such as talking to a stranger.

Most previous killers involved in honour-related crimes end up receiving sentences ranging from three months to one year — depending on the circumstances of each case.

The Civil Status Laws also "discriminate against women who marry non-Jordanian men," by failing to entitle them to pass on their citizenship to their husbands and children, activists said.

Jordanian men who marry non-Jordanian women can give them their nationality.

Women experienced a major defeat last year when Parliament endorsed an election law without allocating them a quota to ensure their presence in the all-male Lower House in future elections.

Most women activists had been pushing for a quota system along the line of seats allocated to religious or ethnic minorities such as Christians and Circassians following their defeat in 1997 general elections. None of the women candidates managed to clinch a seat in the elections two years ago.

Several surveys conducted on the status of women in society showed frustrating and bleak results, activists said.

A survey conducted by the Oslo-based Institute for Applied Social Science (IAFOS) in cooperation with the department of statistics on Jordanian society found deeply-enriched and extremely negative attitudes towards women.

It said that four of five Jordanians believe men are more capable of political work than women.

The survey, which consisted of interviews with a representative sample of 6,000 households from all over the Kingdom, stated that one in five men surveyed did not want women to vote, and the majority of those surveyed saw women's role at home.

One alarming factor in the study, considered by sociologists as the most updated so far, was the objection of males between the age of 20 to 24 to women's political participation.

Fifty-seven per cent of them were against the idea of female parliamentarians or ministers and 40 per cent were against women working for charities.

Another study on "Jordanian Women in Leadership Positions," revealed that women's participation in the overall local labour force stood at 13 per cent.

The study, conducted in 1996 and unveiled last July, indicated that one in every 1,000 employed women occupied a higher administrative position.

A third study conducted by the Human Forum for Women's Rights on "Violence Against Women in Jordan: Demographic Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims," revealed that "crimes of honour" still constitute the highest percentage of premeditated murders in Jordan followed by rape.

A suggestion raised by Deputy Salameh Hiari during a parliamentary session in February that women should stay at home to raise their kids while men go out to win the family's bread generated popular anger among many women activists.

Deputy Hiari, who delivered a speech during a five-day debate on the 1998 draft budget, suggested that the country's 54,000 working women should quit their jobs and concentrate on raising the next generation to help advance the nation.

He argued that this will help the country's unemployed men find jobs and stated that "a good mother raises a good child."

"Women should never dream of gaining equal rights to men because of their physical differences," Hiari told parliamentarians.

Naffa and other activists verbally fought back, but to no avail.

"The issue is not a matter of equality," Naffa said. "Women are demanded to participate in all aspects of life to help realise all aspects of development related to the country," Naffa said.

plan to open a women's shelter, the first of its kind in the Arab World, to house women who are threatened by their families for "honour" reasons, or women who are victims of domestic abuse.

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Naffa and other activists verbally fought back, but to no avail.

"The issue is not a matter of equality," Naffa said. "Women are demanded to participate in all aspects of life to help realise all aspects of development related to the country," Naffa said.

plan to open a women's shelter, the first of its kind in the Arab World, to house women who are threatened by their families for "honour" reasons, or women who are victims of domestic abuse.

But despite these positive strides, most female activists say they are facing an uphill battle and major work is still needed to ensure women's full integration into society.

Between 40 to 50 women involved in cases of immoral behaviour remain locked up in government correctional facilities under what is termed as "protective custody," because of their suspected immoral behaviours or for committing adultery.

Naffa and Khader said existing laws still discriminate against women while their political representation in government remains minimal.

"This is something we need to work on to change," said Khader.

Both female activists pointed to an urgent need to eliminate the stereotyping of women both in school curricula and in the media.

Crimes of honour against women are continuing.

Officials said at least 25 women were reportedly killed in the Kingdom in honour crimes in 1997 — 95 per cent of them were killed based solely on suspicion of immoral behaviour.

Figures for 1998 have not been released, but officials expect them to exceed 20 such murders.

Khader and other activists believe women organisations and the JNCW should step up efforts to speed up amendments to legislation which discriminate against women.

Article 340 of the Penal Code reduces or exempts the penalty against any person who kills a female relative who commits adultery or is found in an adulterous situation — such as talking to a stranger.

Most previous killers involved in honour-related crimes end up receiving sentences ranging from three months to one year — depending on the circumstances of each case.

The Civil Status Laws also "discriminate against women who marry non-Jordanian men," by failing to entitle them to pass on their citizenship to their husbands and children, activists said.

Jordanian men who marry non-Jordanian women can give them their nationality.

Women experienced a major defeat last year when Parliament endorsed an election law without allocating them a quota to ensure their presence in the all-male Lower House in future elections.

Most women activists had been pushing for a quota system along the line of seats allocated to religious or ethnic minorities such as Christians and Circassians following their defeat in 1997 general elections. None of the women candidates managed to clinch a seat in the elections two years ago.

Several surveys conducted on the status of women in society showed frustrating and bleak results, activists said.

A survey conducted by the Oslo-based Institute for Applied Social Science (IAFOS) in cooperation with the department of statistics on Jordanian society found deeply-enriched and extremely negative attitudes towards women.

It said that four of five Jordanians believe men are more capable of political work than women.

The survey, which consisted of interviews with a representative sample of 6,000 households from all over the Kingdom, stated that one in five men surveyed did not want women to vote, and the majority of those surveyed saw women's role at home.

One alarming factor in the study, considered by sociologists as the most updated so far, was the objection of males between the age of 20 to 24 to women's political participation.

Fifty-seven per cent of them were against the idea of female parliamentarians or ministers and 40 per cent were against women working for charities.

Another study on "Jordanian Women in Leadership Positions," revealed that women's participation in the overall local labour force stood at 13 per cent.

The study, conducted in 1996 and unveiled last July, indicated that one in every 1,000 employed women occupied a higher administrative position.

A third study conducted by the Human Forum for Women's Rights on "Violence Against Women in Jordan: Demographic Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims," revealed that "crimes of honour" still constitute the highest percentage of premeditated murders in Jordan followed by rape.

A suggestion raised by Deputy Salameh Hiari during a parliamentary session in February that women should stay at home to raise their kids while men go out to win the family's bread generated popular anger among many women activists.

Deputy Hiari, who delivered a speech during a five-day debate on the 1998 draft budget, suggested that the country's 54,000 working women should quit their jobs and concentrate on raising the next generation to help advance the nation.

He argued that this will help the country's unemployed men find jobs and stated that "a good mother raises a good child."

"Women should never dream of gaining equal rights to men because of their physical differences," Hiari told parliamentarians.

Naffa and other activists verbally fought back, but to no avail.

"The issue is not a matter of equality," Naffa said. "Women are demanded to participate in all aspects of life to help realise all aspects of development related to the country," Naffa said.

'CIA aiding Indian missionaries to spread Christianity'

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A Hindu hardline group has alleged that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is aiding Christian missionaries in India, as Christians come under fresh attacks, reports said Sunday.

The Asian Age quoted a leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council), which is spearheading an anti-Christian drive, as saying the CIA was giving funds to propagate Christianity in India.

Acharya Giriraj Kishore, senior vice-president of the VHP, said \$12 million "is pumped in to help the spread of Christianity in India as a part of a global evangelisation plan."

"With these funds they were roping in unemployed youths and indulging in conversions (of Hindus)," he said.

The VHP is an anti-Muslim and anti-Christian group allied to India's ruling Hindu nationalist-led government. It has been accused of attacking Christians in recent weeks in the western state of Gujarat.

Kishore denied this, and instead alleged that the violence unleashed against the Christian minority was a "well planned conspiracy

by the Christian world, particularly the CIA," against Hindu-dominated India.

The campaign against Christians, who make up just 2.5 per cent of India's 975 million people, has embarrassed the nine-month-old government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) has tried to distance itself from the extremist violence. Sunday, it described the violence as "extremely unfortunate."

Vajpayee, seen as the most secular of Hindu nationalist politicians, is being forced to tread a fine line between the sectarian demands of his party's Hindu revivalist allies and India's secular constitution.

Christians say attacks by Hindu zealots have increased since the BJP came to office in India at the head of a multi-party coalition last year. Most attacks have taken place in BJP-ruled Gujarat.

Despite the government's pledge to halt the violence against Christians, sporadic incidents continued in Gujarat, with two chapels set on fire late Thursday and Friday, newspapers said Sunday.

Both attacks took place in



An unidentified priest stands outside a damaged building in Subir village in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Terror-stricken by violent attacks on churches and missionary institutions, the Christian community in tribal areas of India's Gujarat province feels threatened and insecure (Reuters photo)

the tribal-dominated district of Dangs. The Indian Express said. No one was injured in the violence.

The newspaper quoted Father Cedric Prakash, a local Church leader, as saying that Hindu fundamentalists were "using terror tactics" against Christians.

Sunday, the second largest member of India's ruling coalition said the unending violence in "defiance of central authority struck at the very heart of

good governance."

The AIADMK party said the violence had "stained the fair name of India," and urged New Delhi to sack the Gujarat government if the attacks did not halt.

A federal government team which visited Gujarat has blamed Hindu fundamentalists for the violence.

Vajpayee, in a New Year message, denounced "religious bigotry" and said every Indian, "irrespective of his caste or creed," had

the same rights.

The authorities have been widely criticised over the anti-Christian violence.

New Delhi Archbishop Alan de Lastic accused the BJP-led Gujarat government of inaction and said its chief minister appeared to have given the attackers "a free hand."

"I do not think the miscreants can go on without the approval of top leaders. This kind of systematic planned violence against

one community has never been seen," he said.

"This mars the democratic spirit of the constitution. It is all right to have an ideology but do not force it down somebody else's throat like they (Hindu hardliners) are doing."

"There have been a lot of words. Now it is time for action that will preserve and protect the rights of the minorities in the home state of Mahatma Gandhi," de Lastic said.

Australia wants U.N. access to Angola crash site

CANBERRA (R) — Australia called Sunday for United Nations officials to be granted access to the site of a U.N.-chartered plane shot down in Angola over rebel territory.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer also expressed concern about the fate of those on board the aircraft, which crashed on Dec. 26.

They include Australian lawyer Patrick Luckman, who was working for the United Nations.

"There are compelling humanitarian reasons to allow access because of the continuing great distress to the families of those on board," Downer said in a statement.

Australia was also concerned about the way the United Nations had been frustrated in its attempts to reach the crash site.

The C-130 cargo plane, carrying 14 people including Luckman and seven other U.N. workers, crashed

just after taking off from the central Angolan town of Huambo.

Another U.N. C-130 with eight passengers and crew was shot down over the same district Saturday, the U.N. said.

The town is in a battle zone between Angolan government forces and rebels from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Since the plane came down there have been conflicting reports about whether its passengers survived.

"These reports are placing an intolerable burden on the families of those who were on board the aircraft, including an Australian, Mr Patrick Luckman," Downer said.

"United Nations officials in Angola are still having difficulty getting to the truth of the matter and the Australian government would be extremely concerned if the crash develops

into some kind of propaganda game between UNITA forces and the Angolan government."

"I have asked the Australian Ambassador to the United Nations, Ms. Penny Wensley, to directly inform the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, of the Australian government's deep concern about the way in which the United Nations has been frustrated in its efforts to reach the crash site."

Downer said he had also asked Wensley to make representations to the Angolan representative and had asked Australia's High Commissioner in Harare, Denise Fischer, to travel to Angola as soon as possible to convey Australia's concerns to the government and to the UNITA rebels.

Both Australian representatives would continue to support Mr Annan's appeals to the Angolan government and UNITA for access to the crash site.

Flooding shuts schools for 14,000 pupils in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Some 14,000 students in low-lying areas in a eastern Malaysia were excused from the first day of the new school term Sunday due to floods which have claimed two lives, officials said.

Twenty schools in Kelantan state, where two people have died, were flooded or had access roads cut, state education director Mohamed Hassan was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency.

Mohamed said the schools were expected to resume class in the next two days as flood waters appeared to be receding.

"The students would be asked to attend class if it is not dangerous for them to do so," he reportedly said after visiting affected schools.

A Kelantan education official said the department had left it to the discretion of school principals to decide on the closure, but any holidays would have to

be replaced.

The Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah states on the east coast of peninsula Malaysia follow the Muslim calendar and observe Friday and Saturday as weekends.

In neighbouring central Pahang state, 43 schools would also be closed on their first day Monday as they were either flooded or being used as relief centres, education department official Mustapa Mat told AFP.

There are no statistics on the number of pupils affected in Pahang, Mustapa said, adding he did not know how long the closure would last.

Officials in both Kelantan and Pahang said the schools hit by floods were mostly those sited along rivers. Several spots in the two states remained submerged several roads closed to traffic or passable by only heavy vehicles.

"The situation is that bad and it will be impossible to do anything as the water had risen up to between two

and 2.5 metres at the schools," Pahang chief minister Mohamad Khalil Yaakob reportedly said.

"It will take at least two to three days for the water to subside even if the rain stops."

So far, 2,199 people from 400 families in five districts in Pahang have been evacuated and placed in 62 relief centres, police spokesman Hamzah Mat Jamil said.

The Sunday Star reported that northern Johore state was not spared, with flood waters cutting access to eight settlements comprising some 1,500 people for more than two days.

It cited a meteorological department official as saying the northeast monsoon was expected to finish at the end of this month.

The monsoon season has ended months of dry weather for the country caused by the El Niño weather pattern.

Chechen police bust major criminal group

MOSCOW (AP) — Police in the breakaway region of Chechnya arrested nine members of an armed gang and seized a large number of weapons after the group attacked a police station, news reports said Sunday.

Gang members Saturday night tried to free a comrade being held at a jail in Chechnya's Sherkovskiy district, but were repelled by police after a gun battle. Officials then sealed off the area and the two sides continued trading fire, according to the Interfax news agency.

Police arrested four gang members, but an unidentified number of gunmen escaped the blockade and headed to the Chechen capital of Grozny.

Police followed, and dispersed the group after a prolonged clash near a hospital, according to the ITAR-TASS news agency.

A search operation ensued, and police arrested another five fighters who had fled to districts around Grozny. Officials confiscated machine guns,

grenade launchers, mines, explosives and forged identification documents.

Two gang members were wounded during the fighting, and police suffered no casualties, Interfax said.

Chechen leaders accuse the gang of multiple murders, armed attacks, and kidnappings in Chechnya and the neighbouring Russian republic of Dagestan, according to ITAR-TASS.

Armed gangs have brought widespread chaos to Chechnya since the mostly-Islamic region's 1994-6 independence war with Russia.

Murder, theft, kidnapping and other crimes have been committed with virtual impunity.

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, unable to control the rising crime wave, recently imposed a state of emergency and promised to crack down on armed bandits in the region.

But opposition from the region's Islamic courts and a severe lack of funds have limited the effectiveness of Maskhadov's efforts.

Filipina calls for rapist father to die as death row vigil starts

MANILA (AFP) — Church and rights groups Sunday began a 24-hour vigil for a death row inmate due to be the first person to be executed in the Philippines in 22 years, as his teenage daughter who he was convicted of raping called for him to die.

Leo Echegaray, 38, is due to die Monday at 3:00 p.m. (0700 GMT) by lethal injection for raping his daughter, Baby, in 1994 when she was just 11.

"I want Echegaray to die now. I feel hurt every time I hear things about me. Why do they glorify him. How about me, how about me? I am the victim here," Baby said in a radio interview Sunday.

So far President Joseph Estrada has rejected all appeals for clemency for the house painter under the death penalty which was restored in 1994.

In a radio station DZBB Sunday, Baby appealed to several legislators seeking to review the death penalty to let the law take its course.

For every minute of delay

killed," she said.

Baby, who is now 15 and lives with a foster family, said Echegaray has destroyed "my life and my studies" saying her classmates make cruel jokes about her predicament.

"How I wish I never had him as a father. He made me but he never respected me as a daughter," she said. She met with Estrada on New Year's Eve.

Her plea was backed by her mother, Echegaray's former girlfriend Rosalie Rivera with whom he has three other children.

"It will end our suffering. It will stop all those baseless stories about my daughter. Unless Leo is executed, those stories won't stop. We should end it now, let's not prolong it," she said in an interview published Sunday.

Earlier reports said Baby was Echegaray's stepdaughter. But Rivera said she had only said that after she was prevailed upon by Echegaray's lawyer believing it would mitigate the offence.

Families of the 864

inmates in death row were meanwhile expected to hold an overnight death watch at the national penitentiary's chapel.

And other rights and church groups were to join the vigil in a silent protest against Estrada's "unforgiving stance" on capital punishment.

"We will have an overnight vigil from 8:00 p.m. (1200 GMT) until tomorrow morning then we will resume with masses at the grandstand of the national penitentiary," Father Jun-Jun Borres, who heads a Jesuit mission counselling death row inmates, told AFP.

All church bells in this largely Catholic country will simultaneously toll in protest at the moment of the execution and prayers of acceptance will also be offered, Borres said.

Borres said they would also pray for Estrada to be enlightened about the death penalty.

"Prayers for authorities especially for Joseph Estrada who seems to have a myopic view and simplis-

tic assessment of the whole thing will also be offered. We are hoping that they will be enlightened," he said.

Father Borres said Echegaray's execution also had a "profound effect" on the other inmates on death row, who have retreated to "uncomfortable silence" in the past several days.

"It's just going to be a sad day for all of us," he said. Efforts to stay the execution have all been opposed by Estrada, stressing that the crime was "bestial" and that he has to implement the law.

He has also rebuffed pleas from the Vatican, the European Union and global rights group Amnesty International. The only thing that could save the convict now is a last-minute order from the Supreme Court, whose 13 justices are expected to hold a quorum Monday morning to decide whether or not to grant a motion by the convict's lawyer to stay the execution after several congressmen filed a resolution to review the death penalty.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Teachers angry over Blair's children missing start of school term

LONDON (AFP) — Teachers are furious that Prime Minister Tony Blair's three children are going to miss the start of the school term because they are on holiday with their parents in the Seychelles, the Express reported Sunday. John McIntosh, headmaster of the London Oratory, at which 14-year-old Euan and his 13-year-old brother Nicky are pupils, told the Sunday paper he had not been informed in advance that the boys would be back at school a day late. "I am really tough about that sort of thing. I say to parents that they must observe what I call the three Hs — holidays, holidays and home-work," said McIntosh. The boys' 10-year-old sister Kathryn will miss two days at her primary school; the St. Jeanne d'Arc, David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, slammed the Blair decision: "This is a very bad example for the prime minister to set. It will not help head teachers who are trying to enforce a policy of persuading parents to be more responsible." Aides at the prime minister's residence at Downing Street said the Blair children would fly out of the Indian Ocean archipelago Wednesday, when their parents also leave to begin an official visit to South Africa. They will arrive back in London Thursday morning after a 12-hour flight and go straight to school.

'Indian scientists must forge ahead despite nuclear sanctions'

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Sunday urged Indian scientists to be "trend-setters" despite nuclear-related sanctions which have shut the door on cooperation with many of their U.S. counterparts. "Strength respects strength," Vajpayee told a conference in the southern city of Madras being attended by more than 5,000 Indian and foreign scientists. "Indian scientists must resolve not to remain recipients of scientific and technological knowledge from outside, but also become major contributors. We cannot afford to purely imitate or to be satisfied with following the science the other nations are doing. We have to be trend-setters in our own right in as many areas as possible," Vajpayee said. "India must forge closest collaborations with institutions abroad. However, our scientists must be prepared to deliver the goods, if any country tries to arm-twist us and deny us the opportunities of legitimate scientific cooperation." Washington barred 40 Indian companies and their 200 subsidiaries of trading with the U.S. last year as part of the sanctions slapped on New Delhi after it conducted a series of nuclear tests in May. Scientific cooperation in technologically sensitive areas was also halted. "India is not new to technology denials... such attempts in the last three decades had spurred Indian scientists to further strengthen their national capabilities," Vajpayee was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India. India's five nuclear tests in May sparked off retaliatory tests by arch-rival Pakistan and global condemnation.

German train derails after sabotage

BERLIN (AFP) — Sabotage caused a regional Berlin train to derail overnight Saturday, but no injuries were reported, police said Sunday. The engine derailed after hitting cement blocks placed on the tracks about 300 metres before the Zerpnick station. Some 150 metres of electric track were damaged, a spokesman for the train network said. Twelve passengers and a driver were on board the train. Police are investigating. In December, German press reports said a suspected blackmailer who had threatened sabotage on Germany's rail network was arrested after he tried to extort 10 million marks (\$5.8 million) from German rail company Deutsche Bahn.

12-year-old boy critical after playing Russian roulette

ORLANDO, Florida (AFP) — A 12-year-old Florida boy was hospitalised in extremely critical condition after shooting himself in the head while playing Russian roulette, police here reported. Timothy James Hadley, 12, shot himself in the head with a .38-calibre revolver while playing Russian roulette with a 15-year-old friend late Friday in the Orlando suburb of Palm Bay, police said. Police believe Hadley was playing Russian roulette because there was only one bullet in the chamber. "It does appear right now that it is an accidental shooting," Palm Bay police Detective George Santiago said. Police are looking for Hadley's friend, who called for help then fled the scene. They want to interview him as a witness and do not consider him a suspect, Santiago said. In Russian roulette one bullet is placed in a revolver barrel. The player closes the barrel, spins it, then puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger, hoping to find an empty chamber.

Explosion kills six Ukrainian coal miners

KIEV (R) — Six Ukrainian miners died and another was badly injured by an explosion that ripped through a coal mine in the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk, a local emergency ministry official said Sunday. Viktor Sapon said the blast occurred late Saturday at a mine in the town of Kirovsk as workers were preparing explosives underground. "Rescue workers recovered six miners' bodies and evacuated one injured miner," Sapon said by telephone from Luhansk, 750 kilometres southeast of the Ukrainian capital Kiev. Last April a gas blast at Skochinsky mine in the Donetsk region killed 63 miners. Mining companies say old equipment and lack of cash are largely to blame for the industry's safety problems.

Man-eating tiger in Nepal shot after claiming 50th victim

KATHMANDU (AFP) — A ferocious man-eating tiger in Nepal believed to have killed 50 people in the past six months has been shot dead, an official said Sunday. "The male man-eating tiger, which had terrorised 10 villages in Baitadi district, was finally shot dead by two hunters last week," Chief District Officer Bhola Siwakoti told AFP. "After local people requested the district administration to get rid of the menace which had in the past six months killed 50 people including children, two hunters were ordered to shoot it down," he said. Last year a tigress also terrorised several villages in Baitadi district, 495 kilometres west of Kathmandu, and left 65 people dead before it was shot dead, the official added.

World

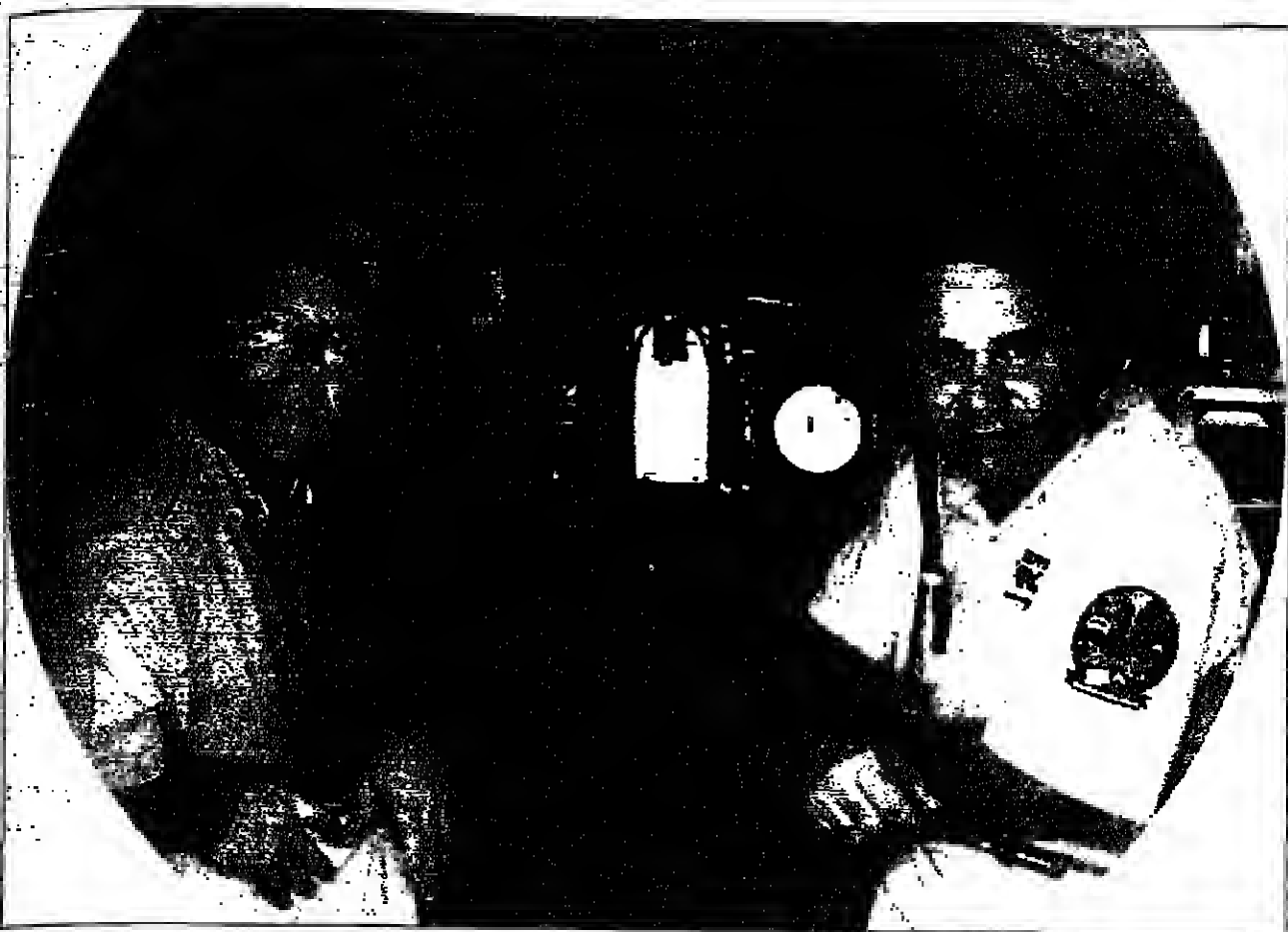
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Team RE/MAX balloon pilots Dave Liniger of Denver Colorado (left) and Bob Martin of Albuquerque New Mexico are pictured inside the gondola during testing at mission control Jan. 3. The team announced yesterday it was likely that only two pilots would fly in the gondola due to safety concerns. It is unknown which pilot will not make the flight which is an attempt to set a world record for a non-stop balloon flight around the globe flying in the stratosphere (Reuters photo)

Outback winds delay round-world balloon attempt

ALICE SPRINGS, Australia (R) — An attempt to boldly circle the earth in a balloon flying on the edge of space was put off for at least five days Sunday because of high winds at the launchpad in outback Australia.

The lift-off was originally scheduled for Dec. 27, but has been postponed repeatedly because the giant balloon — designed to avoid weather problems by cruising at a height of 39 km — is vulnerable to winds at launch.

"The next possible launch date is Friday, Jan. 8," said Steve Gascoigne, a spokeswoman for Team RE/MAX, the Australian-U.S. team preparing the balloon attempt.

Gascoigne said a low pressure zone was heading from the north towards the launchpad at Alice Springs, bringing higher winds to Australia's dusty "red centre" and preventing a lift-off

as earlier planned, Monday. A high pressure zone moving up from the south-west could then bring rain mid-week, forcing a further delay until at least Friday at the NASA launch facility at Alice Springs.

The team is aiming to become the first to circle the earth non-stop in a balloon. Two of their rivals, Britain's Richard Branson and American Steve Fossett, were plucked from the sea off Hawaii last week as bad weather forced them to abort a similar round-world attempt.

No other team has yet attempted to fly so high, at the very edge of the stratosphere where atmospheric pressure will be only 1/250th of that at ground level and crew members will have to wear Russian space suits.

The balloon will be 270 metres high at launch — about the same as a 40-

storey building — before rounding out with helium. Gascoigne said Sunday that winds at that height were currently 12 knots, more than the balloon could handle.

The balloon is made of polyethylene only marginally thicker than lunch wrap with 178 supporting straps down to an aluminium gondola — explaining its vulnerability.

The gondola was originally going to carry three balloonists, Australian John Wallington and Americans Dave Liniger and Bob Martin.

But the team said at the weekend that a band of extreme cold temperature at about 20,000 metres could jeopardise the mission unless one of the three men remained behind.

"The balloon and payload must pass through a band of extreme cold temperature before entering the stratosphere," said co-pilot Liniger.

"If the ascent is too slow, the balloon itself could become brittle and prone to failure," Liniger said. Additional external ballast may be required to increase the balloon's ascent through the cold band, but extra weight could not be added to the overall payload — meaning that one of the pilots would have to miss the trip.

The three are due to decide between themselves who misses the trip and gave no hints Sunday who would be chosen.

Despite the delays, the pilots and support staff at the Alice Springs mission control have maintained high spirits and are using the extra time to fine-tune the balloon, ignoring daytime temperatures in Alice Springs of up to 38 Celsius.

The trip is expected to take 18 days and will return the balloon to Australia.

Police detain two Chinese dissidents for nine months

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese police have sentenced two members of a would-be opposition political party to nine months of detention on what a rights group Sunday called fabricated charges.

Han Lifa and Cai Guohua are the latest members of the nascent China Democracy Party to be imprisoned in the ruling Communist Party's broadest crackdown on dissent in three years.

The aggressive campaign prompted one influential democracy campaigner now in exile, Wang Nizhe, to launch a hunger strike.

Weakened by a week of fasting, Wang was taken to a New York hospital Sunday. He was released Sunday, and friends said he vowed to continue fasting.

Police in Shanghai notified Han's and Cai's families in late December of

their detentions, two months after they were last seen in public, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China reported.

The police notices accused Han and Cai of patronising prostitutes, a charge both men denied to their families, the Information Centre said.

Han told family members on a visit last week to the detention centre that he went drinking with a friend on Oct. 23 and the next morning woke up in police custody, the group said.

Cui was dining and drinking with a business partner at a Shanghai hotel on Oct. 30 when two women entered the hotel room and took off their clothes, the group said. Police followed immediately.

The Information Centre

said Chinese authorities were making up the prostitution charges to try to smear democracy campaigners and deflect international criticism of the crackdown.

The foreign ministry acknowledged last week that two exiled democracy campaigners who slipped back into China in November were sentenced without trial to three years forced labour, ostensibly for hiring prostitutes.

In a brief statement, the foreign ministry said one of the dissidents, Zhang Lin, previously served three years in a labour camp for hooliganism. London-based Amnesty International reported that Zhang had been imprisoned for trying to set up an independent labour union.

Han and Cai both had previous run-ins with authori-

ties. Han just finished a three-year stint in a labour camp in March for democracy campaigning while Cai served two years in prison for trying to form a labour union in 1989.

Both men had been under police pressure. The two held weekly discussion groups at a teahouse in a Shanghai park on such issues as human rights treaties, and police had warned them to stop, the Information Centre reported.

At least four other members of the China Democracy Party have been imprisoned.

Three principal organisers, Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai, were sentenced to more than 11 years in prison, among the harshest punishments given dissidents in three years.

Opposition 'won't drag' Taiwan into war over independence

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — In an unprecedented televised debate, leading opposition politicians assured the public Sunday their party will not bring the island to the brink of war with Beijing over its controversial call for independence from China.

The four participants were divided over whether the party's platform should be amended, but they agreed the Democratic Progressive Party must try to ease public wariness that it is heading toward military confrontation with China.

Former DPP Secretary General Chiu Yih-Jen objected to revising the platform, which would require any declaration of independence be put to a public referendum.

"Establishing a sovereign Republic of Taiwan remains our goal, but it does not mean we will resort to any means to achieve that goal," he said.

"We must respond to voters' worries and assure them we will not ignore the reality and make any reckless moves," Chiu pointed out that ruling Nationalists still cling to the goal of eventual reunification with China although they have in fact moved towards establishing a de facto sovereign state in Taiwan.

Lawmaker Lin Cho-Shui also objected to changing the platform, saying it still will not appease Beijing.

Taiwan and China were politically separated in 1949, but Beijing claims sovereignty over the island and threatens to invade if Taiwan ever declares independence.

The main opposition party lost badly in last month's legislative elections to the Nationalists, and many DPP politicians realise its independence platform could cost them votes.

The debate will be followed by months of public

and private talks before the platform comes up for formal discussion at the party congress in May.

Kuo Cheng-Liang, a political scientist and a former DPP strategist, proposed changing the platform to reflect the DPP's position that it will not rush into declaring independence.

"Don't look at any proposed changes as a betrayal of our mission," Kuo said. "Our platform is outdated and has negative effects. It gives the public the misconception that we want to overthrow the status quo," Lawmaker Sheng Fu-Hsiung agreed changes are needed.

"Most voters back the DPP's various reforms but are reluctant to support us because our platform leaves them with fears," he said.

"We are obligated to change its wording to show that we are a responsible party,"

Snowstorm disrupts parts of U.S.

CHICAGO (AFP) — Heavy snow, ice and strong winds closed airports and disrupted road and rail travel across the Midwest and southern United States, regional authorities said, stranding thousands of travellers returning home from the Christmas and New Year holidays.

At least 12 people have died in storm-related accidents over the past days, CNN reported.

The storm has dumped some 55 centimetres of snow on much of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Further south, freezing rain and sleet has sent vehicles fishtailing on roads as deep as South Carolina.

In Washington D.C. residents spent the weekend stockpiling food, batteries and flashlights, fearing a repeat of the 1996 blizzard that closed down the city — including much of the federal government — for days.

With an estimated 1.9 million air passengers expected to fly home Sunday at the end of the holiday weekend, airlines and travellers were bracing for nightmare conditions throughout the day.

Thousands of travellers were stranded at Chicago's O'Hare International, the world's busiest airport, when United Airlines and American Airlines, two of the largest U.S. carriers, shut down operations because of poor visibility.

United Airlines officials warned travellers trying to leave O'Hare they may have to wait until Monday or even Tuesday.

At nearby Midway Airport, other airlines such as Southwest also cancelled flights.

In Detroit Metropolitan Airport flights were also cancelled due to the bad weather, while TWA cancelled nearly 400 flights at its main hub in St. Louis, Missouri. Scores of flights were likewise cancelled in Columbus, Ohio.

In Chicago, winds gusting at up to 100 kilometres per hour forced city officials to close the scenic Lake Shore Drive along Lake Michigan as between 30 and 50 centimetres of snow blanketed the metropolitan area.

It is one of the four most devastating blizzards to hit Chicago since records began in 1885, and the worst since 1979, officials said.

"This is a major storm, and the clean-up will take time, perhaps days," said Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. "Our trucks will not be able to start seriously clearing streets until the snow stops and the wind dies down, hopefully sometime Sunday," he added.

Temperatures Sunday hovered around minus 6 Celsius, but with wind chill temperatures dropped to minus 28 Celsius.

Pakistani PM escapes assassination attempt, four killed in explosion

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — Four people died when a time bomb exploded on a bridge in central Pakistan Sunday shortly before Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was to pass over it, said police, who described the attack as an assassination attempt.

The bridge, 3 kilometres from Sharif's private residence in Rawalpindi, was destroyed in the explosion, which occurred at around 0500 GMT. Sharif and his family were to have passed the bridge at that time on their way to Rawalpindi from Lahore.

Their departure was delayed and they were at home in Lahore at the time of the blast. The family later flew from to Rawalpindi by helicopter.

Three civilians and a police officer died in the explosion, and three policemen have been wounded, doctors and police officers in Lahore said.

Earlier Assistant Superintendent of Police Munir Sheikh had said three policemen and one police officer died in the blast.

"We have sent special bomb disposal squad experts for investigations," he said. Witnesses said police stopped traffic on the Lahore-Rawalpindi Road

after the blast, which was heard four kilometres around. Rawalpindi is a small town 22 kilometres from Lahore — capital of central Punjab province.

Police blamed the ethnic Murrhahda Qaumi Movement (MQM), a former ally of Sharif, for the explosion.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a police official said three MQM workers had been arrested in the southern port city of Karachi on suspicion of planning the explosion. He did not disclose the identity of the suspects.

In Lahore, the home town of Sharif, police raided the MQM office, but made no arrests.

But an MQM leader, Sheikh Liaquat, Hussain said there was no question of his party's involvement in the incident.

"I am hearing this news from you," he told The Associated Press from Rawalpindi on telephone.

"The MQM believes in a peaceful struggle, but the police are implicating us in false cases because we are no longer an ally of the government," he said. "We condemn the incident," he said.

The government said the blast was an "act of

terrorism." "The government has taken stringent measures to root out terrorism and this incident has further strengthened our determination to fight against this menace," Mushahid Hussain, the information minister, told reporters in Islamabad. He said the blast was an "act of terrorism."

Sharif blames the MQM, a former ally, for most of the violence in Karachi, a city of 14 million people which has been politically controlled by the MQM since the mid-1980s. More than 1,000 people died in political and religious violence there last year.

The MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking people who immigrated from British India at independence in 1947, denies the accusations and alleges the government is engaging in "state sponsored terrorism" against its ethnic group.

In November, the government set up military courts to try those people responsible for violence in the city.

Earlier in October, Sharif dismissed Sindh provincial government for failing to maintain peace. Now the province is ruled by the federal government.

Arresting Khmer Rouge on their home turf difficult, says analyst

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — As two Khmer Rouge leaders continued their luxury tour of Cambodia Sunday, a local analyst warned that arresting the two and bringing them to trial will be extremely difficult once they are on their home turf.

Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, two of late Khmer Rouge chief Pol Pot's most trusted lieutenants, flew by army helicopter to northwestern Battambang on Sunday after a government-sponsored tour of the famous temples of Angkor Wat.

The two rebels, who struck a defection deal with Prime Minister Hun Sen last week, are expected to move on next to Pailin, a former rebel stronghold.

Pailin is still under the control of other former Khmer Rouge leaders who cut their own deals

with the government in 1996, and who served as intermediaries in the defection of Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea.

Although the thousands of guerrilla soldiers in Pailin have pledged allegiance to Hun Sen's government, it remains a united and heavily armed force that has never had its loyalty to Phnom Penh tested.

Should a move be made to arrest their longtime leaders, it remains unclear whether Pailin's semi-autonomous administration would relent or resist.

"No one knows where their loyalties lie. Not even the government knows for sure," said Kao Kim Houn, the head of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, a local think-tank.

"It is going to be difficult to get them back to Phnom Penh," Since their highly publicised

surrender, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea have been on a government-arranged tour of the country they turned into vast gulags of slave labour camps in an ill-fated attempt to create an agrarian utopia.

Hun Sen has waffled on his support for trying the Khmer Rouge leaders for their role in the deaths of as many as 2 million people during the group's brutal 1975-79 rule.

Initially Hun Sen told Cambodians to forget about a tribunal for the sake of peace, but as calls for justice mounted, the prime minister renewed his support by saying Friday that "the genocidal regime of Pol Pot must be punished."

Kao Kim Houn said the contradictory statements show that Cambodians and the international community will have to keep up the pressure on Hun Sen if a tribunal is to be convened for the ageing guerrilla chiefs.

"Justice will not come easy," said Kao Kim Houn. "The pressure must come from within and without."

Even if work toward a tribunal continues, apprehending Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea and Pailin leader Ieng Sary, who defected to the government in 1996, will be extremely difficult if the three refuse to leave former rebel areas, he said.

Decisions on a tribunal are not expected to be made until after a United Nations report on the matter is completed at the end of the month.

At the request of Cambodia's leaders, a trio of U.N.-appointed legal experts visited Cambodia in November to examine evidence against the Khmer Rouge and assess the possibility of bringing senior leaders of the group to trial.

Congo battles spark refugee exodus to Central African Republic

BANGUI (AFP) — Fighting in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where rebels are battling pro-government forces, has driven hundreds of refugees into the Central African Republic, state radio said Sunday.

The radio said about 1,000 fleeing civilians had crossed the Oubangui river from DRC to seek shelter in the CAR's capital, Bangui, and that more were gathering at the port security post in the morning.

was heard Saturday in Bangui coming from the Zongo region across the river, but the shooting appeared to have died down Sunday morning.

Many refugees had spent the night at the river port in Bangui, an AFP correspondent reported from the scene.

Some told AFP that DRC rebels Thursday captured the town of Gemena, about 150 kilometres southeast of Zongo, from soldiers backing President Laurent Kabila. The insurgents had since advanced to within 50

kilometres of Zongo.

Kabila's troops looted the town across the river from the Central African capital before abandoning Zongo, and some of the DRC soldiers crossed to Bangui with the refugees, according to missionary sources in the city.

The situation in the north of the DRC was "very serious from a humanitarian point of view", the director of the Roman Catholic radio station, Notre Dame de Bangui, said. Representatives of the

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were due Sunday to make contact with the civilians who have fled. Most have rejected any suggestion of repatriation, an AFP correspondent reported.

The conflict in the DRC began with a rebellion in the east in August last year and has directly drawn in at least six other African countries on the military front: Rwanda and Uganda on the rebel side, and Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad in support of Kabila.

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Bad days for oil producers

THE DECLINE in oil prices is causing near panic among oil producing countries especially those which are heavily dependent on their oil revenues for their state expenditures. The drastic drop in oil prices has had serious financial and economic implications on even giant oil exporters such as Saudi Arabia, which this year expects a deficit of over \$12 billion. Kuwait is not faring any better with estimates that its oil revenues may not be sufficient to even cover salaries of state employees. Other Gulf states, including Iran, are also running huge deficits. Other oil producing countries are also in a bind although their economies are more diversified than the Gulf states and are not so totally dependent on oil revenues for their expenditures.

The crisis may reach more ominous proportions should, as projected, the price of one barrel of oil drops to even lower levels. Some observers are now forecasting the price to drop to as low as \$5 per barrel unless the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries agree on an austerity quota plan that would at least keep the price at its current level. It is an open secret that OPEC countries have put themselves in a vicious circle. To compensate for the lowering of oil prices, these countries started pumping more and more oil into the market. Yet with each additional flow of oil into the international market, the prices decrease even further. In the end, oil exporters have failed to earn the urgently needed dollars despite their expanded productions.

Industrial nations that in the 1970s paid \$34 per barrel are now having a field day. Western countries, the heaviest users of oil, have made fortunes of the misfortune of oil producers. Inflation has successfully been contained and consumers are enjoying stable prices. The losers of course are the oil producers. What they should be doing, instead of producing more oil, is keep their resources stored underground. Oil is a non-renewable source of energy and countries blessed with it should not be selling it so cheap.

The trouble lies with the lack of political will on the part of OPEC countries to stick to their respective quotas. Instead of even producing less than their quota share, most OPEC countries are exceeding their quotas and in the process flooding the market with inexpensive oil. Accordingly, OPEC can reverse its current counterproductive strategy of selling more and more oil by cutting down drastically on their production. The revenues of oil producing countries stand to improve rather decrease with any cut in oil production.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Faneek said the foreign presence on the national financial market is still an issue of debate as some people think it is a danger to the state's sovereignty and independence, while others see it as an indication of foreign analysts' trust in the Kingdom's economy. Faneek said he noted that the foreign (non-Arab) investments in the Amman Financial Market belong to specialised organisations and individuals. Such investors, he added, will not have ill-intentions, because like everyone else they are looking for profits. Yet, foreign funds differ in their behaviour from local investors, because even if they own three per cent of the market's shares, they take up around 30 per cent of the circulation volume. This means, according to the writer, that the funds either enter the market to achieve fast profits or for long-term investments. Do such investments benefit the national economy and should be encouraged or are they harmful, Faneek asked.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket said if this winter ends with little rainfall, Jordan might face a water shortage crisis next summer. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation's recent regulation to supervise and control privately-run water wells is the most important decision, and it must be implemented in order to meet demand, said Saket. However, the writer added, such procedures are not enough to cope with the shortage problem. Controlling the use of water from the wells will not totally solve the problems caused by the drought. Similarly, linking Amman's wells to the water network would not meet the shortage that could occur if the Zai Water Treatment Plant faces any further failures. The government has to pay great attention to the topic, issue decisive laws to link several water resources to the network and minimise private use as a solution to the problem, said Saket.

Economic Review

Good-bye to a better year

SO 1998, concluded five days ago, has proven to be a better year for the economy than expected. Indeed, its close at a higher-than-expected growth rate signals the continuance of the recovery that started in 1997 and presents us with more than one reason for cheer.

The economy grew in 1998 by 5.9 per cent in nominal (including inflation) and 2.2 per cent in real terms (after inflation has been accounted for and subtracted). This is a significant improvement from the 5.2 per cent and 1.3 per cent nominal and real growth rates of 1997, signalling a second year of solid economic recovery after the dismal low (0.8 per cent growth) of 1996. Moreover, the economy is expected to grow by 3 per cent in real terms in 1999 with many indicators that this rate of growth is not only feasible but also conservative.

Among the reasons the economy will perform better next year is the fact that the glut in the construction sector seems to have taken its natural course. In 1998, the tax collections from the sale of real estate and revenues from land registration fees grew by 13.3 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively. Secondly, the introduction of the Jordan Remortgage Company, a long overdue concern, will contribute to reviving this sector and reduce its dependence on the Gulf market — in the past, only Jordanians working in the Gulf countries could afford to make house payments. This is no longer the case (it is hoped). What's more, the demand for construction is supposed to fuel growth as we draw nearer to the end of the millennium in expectation that hordes of tourists and pilgrims will descend upon Jordan — however, the oversupply in construction may bring a major glut in 2001 and cause a downturn in Jordan's business cycle which bottomed out in 1996 (which I predicted in detail, together with the expected growth for this year, five months ago in a previous article). Let's not worry about the length of the cycle from now — even though somebody should be really worrying about it.

Additionally, investments committed in 1998 in the mining sector will become productive in 1999 which will lead to further growth, especially since thousands of jobs with some transfer of technology and know-how are expected to result from these investments. Also, the cement industry, which is undergoing an upheaval with the Lafarge investment, will further boost the growth for next year. If the telecommunications sector sees a similar influx of investment in 1999, the economy will shoot beyond the expected 3 per cent as overall productivity and production increase.

Thanks to the energy and drive of the leadership of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity, its minister's resolve to continue to promote Jordan effectively in spite of a shoe-string promotional budget, and the fact that Jordan possesses some of the holiest sites in the Judeo-Christian tradition, tourism has become Jordan's most important and thriving industry. For Jordan, tourism the years 1999 and 2000 will be memorable — and hopefully the dogs of war will sleep peacefully throughout.

Expectations about the peace with Israel and the peace dividends have finally settled to nonchalance. The peace with Israel proved not to be an immediate bonanza and those whose expectations were so

high found coming down from euphoria, with Netanyahu's ascent to power, very painful and adjusted adversely. In 1998, these expectations have become more realistic as experience and learning from dealing with Israel in peace brought to fruition the mature view that full economic cooperation needs more time. However, it is emphatically important that Israel allows the passage of Jordanian goods to the areas of the Palestinian National Authority where, so far, a \$3 billion market has been almost completely monopolised by Israel. This would make 1999 a very pleasant year for Jordanian manufacturers whose goods are demanded and patiently awaited across the river.

So good-bye 1998, you were a good year, and may 1999 be even better!

Dr. Yusuf Mansour



The phony war on Saddam

By Robert Fisk

WHY WAS anyone surprised when America and Britain bombed Iraq just before Christmas? We love these Arab dictators when they do what we want by toppling toppish Egyptian or Libyan kings or invading Iran. But when they nationalise the Suez Canal, attack Berlin discos or invade Kuwait, we bomb them. That's what neo-colonialism is all about.

In the 1930s, the RAF was bombing recalcitrant Iraqis — usually Kurds — under the command of the future Arthur "Bomber" Harris. Sixty years later, we were doing it again. Then the Iraqis were rebels; now they are guilty of far worse crimes, which, through the constant repetition of the list over the past three weeks, have become a mantra of world evil.

So let's get through the 1998 list. President Saddam Hussein, according to Messrs Bill Clinton and Tony Blair:

One: Refuses to abide by countless United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Two: Continues to build weapons of mass destruction;

Three: Blocks the work of UNSCOM arms inspectors;

Four: Abuses human rights;

Five: Has used poison gas "on his own people";

Six: Threatens his neighbours.

We all know President Saddam is awful. Not as bad as Hitler or Stalin, but probably worse than Laurent Kabila, certainly worse than Muammar Qadhafi.

But who else in 1998 qualifies for the first crime? Israel and Serbia. Who qualifies for the second crime? Iran, Israel, Syria, Pakistan, India. Crime number three is exclusive because there's no UNSCOM to inspect the other countries' weapons of mass destruction. But qualifying for crime number four? Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey... you name it. Crime number five? Only Iraq — with a caveat: why does no Western leader mention that he killed far more Iraqis with gas than he did Iraqi Kurds? Because the Kurds were supporting Iran at the time? Or because the Foreign Office and the U.S. State Department supported Iraq when it was gassing Iraqis? Guilty of number six? Iran, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Turkey.

So what were we doing bombing Iraq? Or, more to the point, why weren't we bombing all the other Middle Eastern sinners? Back in February, we clearly wanted to bomb Iraq when President Saddam prevented U.N. arms inspectors from entering his palaces. The U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, produced a "memorandum of understanding" to let the U.N. make a one-time inspection, in the company of foreign diplomats. Then President Saddam reneged again; sending the inspectors home. To the fury of the American military, Bill Clinton called off the hounds at the last moment.

Then President Saddam blocked the inspectors once more, and it was "chicks away." Or so we are led to believe. Certainly, President Saddam had decided to rid himself of the inspectors. Indeed, he almost certainly wished to be bombed — he had given up any hope of having sanctions lifted. He knew he would survive and that the Arab World would sympathise with the Iraqis who suffered and that the U.N. Security Council would be split between the U.S.-British alliance and the rest.

His list of crimes may seem obvious in the West. In the Middle East, the list of those who also commit his crimes is rather better known. And so is the result of eight years of U.N. sanctions: The 5,000 babies dying every month, the children dying of cancer in the irradiated battlefields of southern Iraq, the villagers drinking water from rivers and taps contaminated with sewage, the girls prostituting themselves.

All President Saddam's fault. Messrs Clinton, Blair and Cook tell us. But it's not. Iraq cannot feed itself under the oil-for-food programme, as the U.N.'s bureaucrats have now admitted. President Saddam is unaffected by sanctions, yet we continue to impose them. Journalists are afraid of the figure of a million Iraqis dead through sanctions. But if the death toll for children is correct — and the statistics come from the World Health Organisation — then we're talking about more than 480,000 dead children alone. When do we start talking about genocide?

So this Christmas, we debate the rights and wrongs of killing 62 Iraqi soldiers and 82 civilians in bombing raids and ignore 60,000 dead children

who have expired via sanctions since January. Arabs, of course, do not. However deplorable their regimes, there is an overwhelming sense of fury and humiliation in the Arab World, which the Ramadan bombings have brought to boiling point. The conviction that it was all done to help President Clinton avoid impeachment seems to be out of it beyond the immoral.

And of course, we've forgotten one of the most intriguing — and dangerous — revelations of the year: U.N. senior inspector Scott Ritter's admission that for years he was liaising with the Israeli intelligence service, something the Iraqis had claimed all along (to the contemptuous dismissal of the Americans and British).

French television got it about right... that the prime minister was the president's new White House intern.

Our masters didn't mention that when they launched their cruise missiles, did they? How much of UNSCOM's work was being handed on to the Israelis? Just Mr. Ritter's investigations? He said the Israelis pinpointed targets for inspection to him. Does that mean, directly or indirectly, that they also helped to target the missiles?

Washington politics is so cynical that there is not much point in debating the timing of the air strikes and Mr. Clinton's impeachment. But what about Mr. Blair, shrilly insisting that everything is above board.

French television got it about right when its Guignol series concluded after the bombings that the prime minister was the president's new White House intern.

— The Independent

LETTERS

Best wishes

To the editor:

TOGETHER WITH the people of Jordan, we are happy to bear the cheerful news about His Majesty King Hussein. May we take this opportunity to express our best wishes for the best of health to His Majesty on his return to Jordan following the successful treatment.

The Rand family
 Haifa

True lies

To the editor:

THE RECENT Desert Fox attack on Iraq is another brilliant manifestation of the flagrant abuses of power in the New World order. As part of the good guy act that has been a customary diversion among U.S. politicians, Bill Clinton announces that the embargo on Iraq will remain as long as Saddam reigns. Face-value, these claims may have a glimpse of reason from the Western perspective, where Saddam is viewed as an aggressive and a brutal dictator. Yet, the crazed shelling of that beautiful capital will never bother Saddam, who has established enough safe houses to last a lifetime; and the embargo that has impoverished most of the population is very unlikely to bring hunger to him and his entourage. The victims are the ordinary people; clueless of their fate and the hardships bestowed upon them. Busy striving for food and shelter, they have become divided and weak, and have lost the power and the willingness for change. It was widely discussed in the U.S. media that the embargo would corner people into denouncing their ruler, yet very few argued that the embargo would leave society impotent. In fact, many Iraqis blame the U.S. for their predicament, and after eight years of punishment stand behind their leader, who has become a symbol of steadfastness against the great American evil. So why do U.S. leaders clamour for the termination of Saddam's regime, while at the same time effectively endorsing it? Some material facts remain undeclared.

First, with increasing competition from East Asian economies, U.S. companies stand frustrated as their global market share diminishes. China and Korea are joining Japan in seizing European and American markets with products that compete in quality and price. Europe's economic unity is sure to pose a market threat to American business. In the face of these challenges, the U.S. turns to Gulf oil. Control over the world's energy source has been fruitful for American businesses who, after the war in 1991, have gained the lion's share in rebuilding the infrastructure, the oil fields, and telecommunications systems in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Secondly, the White House has circles to accommodate at home. With continuing budget deficits, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the government to convince the taxpayers of the astronomical contracts won by Defence companies. After the collapse of the Soviet threat, another pretext had to be found through the media to frighten the taxpayers into accepting these contracts. This particular pretext is Saddam Hussein, whose army in 1990 had suddenly become one of the world's largest, and who is mysteriously plotting the seeds for a great biochemical warfare. The pretext of Saddam's dangerous intentions has lost its validity in the eyes of the world, and especially in the eyes of the Muslims and the Arabs, for whom it is now clear, the U.S. bears no respect. The timing of Desert Fox comes as no surprise to most of us because the bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan earlier this year also coincided with hearings on Clinton's embarrassing affair. A new trend is underway, regarding U.S. relations with the Middle East, and it is only a matter of time until the U.S. discover that nobody can be cornered for so long without rupture.

R. Barhouh
 Amman

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

Anchoring the Madaba Plains Project, Tell el-Umayri emerges as one of Jordan's most formidable townsites

(Note: This is the first of three articles on the excavations at Tell el-Umayri and associated surveys and smaller excavations, within the context of the Madaba Plains Project. Today's article focuses on the earliest Bronze Age towns at the site; the second article next week concentrates on the important Iron Age towns; the third article looks at the Classical period and later evidence, and the results of regional surveys and excavations, including evidence for a thriving wine industry in the Iron Age.)

AN ANTIQUITY site that dramatically reflects the rich archaeological record of human civilisation that is still preserved beneath the earth and sand of Jordan is a massive, easily accessible, but largely unknown site on the doorstep of Amman — the hilltop remains of Tell el-Umayri, eleven kilometres south of Amman at the highway turnoff to Amman National Park.

Excavations here since 1984 have uncovered the superimposed remains of some 20 ancient towns, including half a dozen walled towns from pivotal historical periods which have left us few if any urban remains in Jordan.

Tell el-Umayri is important — some would even say unique — in Jordan because its most significant and best preserved remains date from two eras that are not particularly well documented in Jordan — the Bronze and Iron Ages (c. 3000-500 BC), which together comprise that long stretch of historical time known as the Old Testament biblical period. No other single site in the country includes such well preserved cultural and architectural remains from these four pivotal eras: — the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (c. 3300-1500 BC), when walled towns and urban civilisation first emerged in this region and the world as a whole; — the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BC), from which no other site in Jordan has produced such well preserved architecture; — the Iron Age I (c. 1200-918 BC), the period of "the beginning of kingship in the land of Jordan, when local tribal groups were beginning to settle down"; and, — the Iron II-Persian periods (918-332 BC), when the Ammonite kingdom flourished and then gave way to Assyrian,

Babylonian, and Persian control.

Also, few other antiquities sites in Jordan have enjoyed such long-term and multi-sectoral examination, which allows the archaeologists, geologists, and others working there to painstakingly piece together many different aspects of this region's ancient history — from military fortifications, religious architecture and burial practices, to political relations, ancient scripts, and food consumption habits. And finally, this important site is ideally placed to become a modern archaeological park, for it is strategically located on a main highway within easy access of several million Jordanians, many of whom pass by it on the highway or on their way to the adjacent park areas.

Archaeologists, workmen, and scholarly experts from Jordan and 20 other countries have worked at Tell el-Umayri since 1984, and this year completed their seventh season of excavations. Along with parallel excavations and surveys at nearby Tell Hisban and Tell Jalul, this work forms the core of the Madaba Plains Project (MPP). The MPP is a long-term, regional, multi-sectoral scholarly exploration of ancient human cultures, environments, and adaptation strategies in the region between Amman and Madaba. It started as the Hisban Expedition in 1968, under the direction of the late Siegfried H. Horn.

The MPP is sponsored by Andrews University (Michigan, U.S.), in consortium with Canadian University College, LaSierra University, and Walla Walla College.

The Tell el-Umayri Project is directed by Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, and Warren C. Trenchard, with LaSierra University President and former MPP director Lawrence Geraty acting as senior consultant (Dr Geraty's ambition to start the work at Tell el-Umayri was heavily inspired by a desire to push the study of the cultural history of the region further back in time, after the Hisban dig had revealed only scanty remains from the Iron Age, and nothing earlier than that).

The project has also received the active cooperation, support, and advice of Dr Raouf Abujaber, whose family owns the land of the site; he also contributed a study of the modern history of the region of Umayri, with emphasis on the history

of the Abujaber farmstead at Yadoodeh (now converted to the restaurant/handicrafts facility known as Kan Zuman).

The site of Tell el-Umayri is still being investigated and is not yet prepared for visitors, but it is easily viewed from the paved road linking the airport highway with Amman National Park (the impressive Bronze and Iron Age fortifications are on the west side of the hill, and can be best viewed from the entrance to Amman National Park). Plans are underway to develop facilities and explanations for Jordanian and international visitors (as was done so successfully earlier this year at Tell Hisban).

The first inhabitants

The first humans or human-like ancestors who lived in the region around Tell el-Umayri were people who made and used stone tools during the Palaeolithic, or Stone Age, period — between 40,000 and nearly two million years ago. Hand axes, blades, and flint tools from several different Stone Age periods were found in several sites within five kilometres of the tell — probably used by people who were attracted to a seasonal lake in the vicinity of the airport highway's Na'ur turnoff. Among the well identified specimens are Acheulean handaxes from over one million years ago, Lavallois-Mousterian tools from nearly 100,000 years ago, and Neolithic stone tools from 8000-5000 BC.

The earliest settled population so far documented at Tell el-Umayri comprised villagers from the Chalcolithic period (4500-3300 BC) who lived in the valley east of the tell — now buried beneath the airport highway.

The first town

The first exploitation of the tell itself was documented in the form of Early Bronze Age domestic structures on the summit of the hill, along with a fascinating dolmen burial complex on its south-eastern slope. The oldest known structure to date, from around 3000 BC, is the large dolmen — a tomb made of three massive standing stone slabs covered by a single, large horizontal slab. More than 20 humans were buried in the dolmen, which was also

unusual for having seven floors, one on top of the other, immediately outside the tomb itself.

Dr Larry Herr of Canadian University College suggests that "this shows that the people living at the site celebrated funerary rites at the dolmen long after the burials had begun." This is the first dolmen in the entire Mediterranean basin to produce multiple burials, complete pottery vessels (20), and numerous external surfaces.

Also excavated from the earliest settlement were house complexes with several rooms and ceramic vessels on the floors, revealing different aspects of people's daily routines in the Early Bronze Age III period (around 2700-2300 BC), just before the biblical patriarchal period of Abraham). Many domestic artefacts were found in this area, including Canaanite flint blades, spindle whorls, a bone spatula, a mortar and pestle, and other grinding stones.

Among the domestic items found in the houses were storage jars, containing large quantities of chickpeas (garbanzos), lentils, wheat, barley, radishes, squash, olives, grapes and other fruits and vegetables. Perhaps the town residents also ate little meat, to judge by the small amounts of bones found. Other parts of the houses had courtyard areas with cobbled floors, hives, and other evidence of cooking and animal husbandry, along with wide benches and sunken hearths full of ashes.

Some signs suggest that the people from this period may have been fairly prosperous. For example, one family rebuilt its house several times. A small storage cave was dug into the bedrock of a house. Six different phases of the settlement's life have been identified during the EB II and III period (c. 3000-2300 BC). This earliest settlement was probably unwallled, protected only by some terrace walls that also served as house walls; some obvious if rudimentary "town planning" grouped the houses into blocks of dwellings separated by passageways and terraces, said Dr Douglas Clark of Walla Walla College.

The Middle Bronze Age

The settlement remains from the next historical period are among the most significant at this site and in all Jordan —

remains of a Middle Bronze Age (about 1600 BC) walled town with massive fortifications. One partially excavated building was made of very large stones, located near the summit and deep beneath later buildings. Other MB remains include the foundations of a tower on a five-meter-high earthen rampart, and a well-plastered water pool that may be the only one known from this period in all Jordan.

Imported items have been identified from Egypt, Turkey and other regional locations, indicating that the people of Tell el-Umayri were part of a relatively large-scale commercial trading network.

"The Middle Bronze Age is a time when very few settlements existed south of Amman on the Jordanian plateau. To find such substantial remains from such a rare period was unexpected," Dr Herr said in a recent interview at Tell el-Umayri.

Late Bronze Age

Just north of the MB ruins the excavators uncovered a two-room building from the Late Bronze Age (1500-1300 BC). Unlike any others at Tell el-Umayri, the unique walls of this building are constructed of flat stones that resemble mud-bricks, and stand over three meters high. The two identified floor levels were both covered with a thick layer of burned bricks and wood, suggesting that the structure (and the settlement) were destroyed during an attack, either by an invading army or local enemies.

"Jordan has even fewer remains from the Late Bronze Age than from the Middle Bronze Age. This remarkably well preserved building is the only one of its kind and date so far found in this part of Jordan," Dr Herr said. A few other architectural remains from the Late Bronze Age have been excavated in other parts of the country, including north of Amman and in the Jordan Valley.

Formidable fortifications

The rampart fortification system from the Middle Bronze Age is clearly visible at the western edge of the mound, and is one of the most important aspects of this dig. For reasons still unclear, the MB residents of the town clearly felt that

Our Ancient Heritage

A Jordan Times Series



By Rami G. Khouri

they needed better protection than the previous Early Bronze Age inhabitants who had lived in an open, unfortified town. The more vulnerable MB occupants of the site dug a north-south moat across the bedrock ridge on the west side of the site, measuring some five meters deep and six meters wide at the bottom. This was the most vulnerable side of the settlement, and required such protective measures to ward off hostile attacks.

From the eastern bottom of the moat, the town's defence engineers built an earthen rampart at an upward slope of 25-30 degrees for 30 meters, some ten meters higher than the bottom of the moat. The combination of moat and steeply sloping rampart "made a significant barrier to attacking forces from the ridge to the west," according to Dr Herr. He adds that "no sign of a rampart construction has been found on the other sides of the site, where perhaps the natural slopes of the hill were sufficient protection."

Crucial water source

The Tell el-Umayri settlement's ancient water source was a spring located near the base of the northern slope. This was the only reliable year-round water source between Amman and Madaba, and may help to explain the siting of the earliest town and the successive settlements throughout the 3000 years of the Bronze and Iron ages. Around the area of the spring the excavators discovered walls, plaster floors, a large, stone-built shaft, a stone arch, a channel or tunnel, and pottery from several different periods; the pottery indicates that the water source was used during the Early Bronze, Iron I/early Persian, Roman, and Byzantine periods.

Indian perfumers fight to preserve legacy

By Abhik Kumar Chanda
Agence France Presse

INDIAN PERFUMERS are fighting a losing battle to preserve a 3,000-year-old tradition of natural fragrances which can reputedly soothe nerves, cure ailments and pep up one's love life.

Producers and sellers of attar, which became widely popular in medieval times under Moghul rule, say an onslaught of Western-style perfumes, rising prices of ingredients and changing tastes, are leading to its demise.

Ram Singh, New Delhi's leading attar seller, sits in a tiny shop in a medieval quarter near the city's oldest mosque. Set up in 1816, the outlet

"That is why in the old days, it was massaged over the body of a new bride," she said, adding that eau de rose helped to preserve "the skin tone and prevent female hormonal problems".

Kochchar said rosewater had an unconventional use as well.

"It's excellent for a hangover. Just apply it under your nose and it's goodbye to a headache and nausea. It also makes you happy. Have you ever felt sad in a rose garden?"

Kochchar said she was hopeful of attar making a comeback.

"We have to educate people's noses... to tell them that natural is better and that perfumes can cause serious allergies and wrinkles."

"People are becoming aware around the world. Ten years ago when I used to lecture on aromatherapy in the U.S., people said it was all myth and folklore. Now America is full of stores selling natural beauty products."

Mohammed Aslam, a fifth-generation attar manufacturer, said sales in India were down to "10 per cent compared to what they were used to be 15 years ago" but there was a strong market in the Middle East and Turkey.

Aslam declined to give any trade figures but during the interview, his shop was frequented by several customers, nearly all purdah-clad Muslim women, buying perfume.

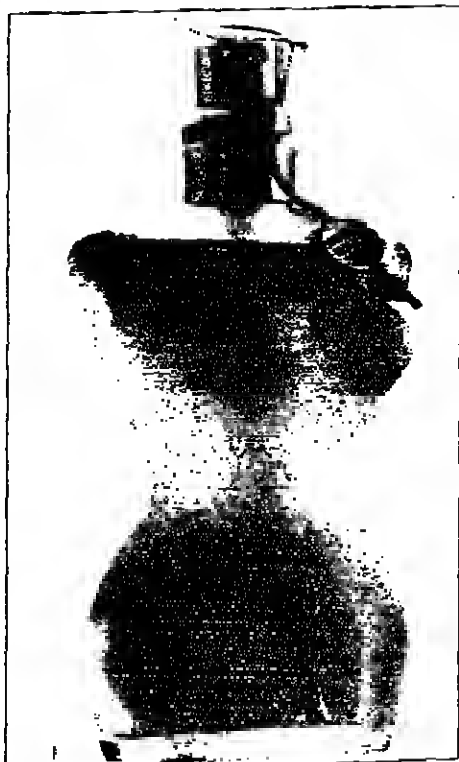
"Not one of them bought attar. That is why I stock modern perfumes and other make-up," he said. Aslam demonstrated the difference between the softer, subtler attar fragrance and other perfumes by dabbing a 200-year-old attar on the wrists of his guests.

"It will linger for hours, much longer than scent (modern perfume) because everything is pure including the base oil," he said of the perfume, the pride of his collection and not for sale.

The attar was kept in its original glass flagon, topped by a silver stopper bearing the monogram and the heraldry of its first owner, the Nizam (ruler) of Hyderabad, reputed to be one of the world's richest men in his lifetime.

Blossom Kochchar, a leading Indian cosmetics manufacturer who exports natural perfumes to Europe and the United States, says attar — mentioned in the Hindu Veda scriptures of around 1000 BC — was used as tranquillisers, medicines and aphrodisiacs.

"They create a certain mood," Kochchar, a well-known aromatherapist, said, adding that one attar variety "acts as a cooler and cures arthritic", while jasmine attar "gives a person confidence and gives birth to feelings of love."



Modern perfume is threatening a 3,000-year-old tradition (file photo)

Subcontinent in midst of AIDS crises AIDS scourge travels India by truck

By Gregory Beitchman
Reuters

JAGDISH SINGH drives his truckload of marble along the dusty Jaipur-Delhi highway. As the sun sets, he stops at a ramshackle roadside cafe for a snack.

These roadside cafes, known as dhabas, are the closest thing to home for some drivers. They offer food, company — and sex. As night falls, prostitutes gather just behind the cafe in a dimly lit huddle of huts.

But what truck drivers see as a casual diversion has become one of the most common routes of transmission in India for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which leads to AIDS.

Fifty trucks line the road as hundreds of other drivers wait patiently for the bus on trucks in the Indian capital to be lifted at nine o'clock. Gurgaon, a town some 30 km from Delhi, is known as a transport hub.

Meanwhile, Singh eats a leathery cube of bread, a splash of lentil curry and pickles.

"Most drivers are having sex on board their trucks or at dhabas," he said, lighting up a cigarette.

"I really don't, but a lot of my friends like a bit of fun after they've eaten. The women from the slums can earn some money, the dhaba owner gets customers."

Outside New Delhi, the Society for the Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM) has convinced at least one dhaba that if it doesn't help stop HIV, its customers could disappear.

"Drivers are away from their families 25 to 26 days a month," said Ramesh Kumar, director of SPYM, which

promotes education about Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS.

"They have a natural urge for sex, and let's face it sex workers are available on the highway, they're an easy target for the virus. It's frightening. Once they've got HIV, it follows them home, spreads to wives, children and so on." Above the aroma of frying garlic and spices from the kitchen of Rosy Dhaba, SPYM has set up a clinic where drivers can get treatment for sexual diseases, and learn a little about AIDS.

Counselors say that up to 70 per cent of the men who walk into the clinic already have some kind of sexually transmitted disease, which can mean they are especially vulnerable to HIV infection.

"It's a matter of developing a relationship with the drivers. If we can develop trust then we can talk about behavioural changes," said Dr Rajneesh Sikhi, a part-time physician with the programme.

"If we can get behavioural changes then we can begin to advise on the real issues, like using condoms." In front of the restaurant, counselors demonstrate condom use to a group of drivers who nervously sip cups of tea.

The condoms cost only one rupee (2.5 U.S. cents) for 10, but price is not the issue.

"I take fistfuls of condoms and force them to take them away," says Kumar. "They're like kids when we talk about sex."

"Most don't think twice about it, which is the problem. If these men would talk to their wives about sex, they might have a better experience, and not bother with what the road offers." Studies say millions of Indians

have contracted the AIDS virus and that most of them are not aware that they are HIV positive.

Officials concede the number of cases is growing.

"We are trying to estimate the number, but the prevalence is varying from state to state, so the figure could be somewhere between three to four million cases," said Prasad Rao, director of the National AIDS Control Organisation.

A government study carried out in four states found rates of HIV infection as high as 23.62 per 1,000.

Government statistics show that most HIV transmission in India has been through heterosexual sex rather than homosexual relations or sharing of contaminated needles by drug abusers.

While deaths from the virus are still low, medical officials say treating sick patients will be the next challenge.

Expensive combinations of anti-viral drugs developed in the United States and Europe have reduced deaths from AIDS by as much as 80 per cent in the Western world. In India most of these drugs are too expensive for ordinary people.

"These drugs are freely available in the market and we have abolished customs duty on them... for those who have the money they can buy it in the market," Rao said. "But to make it freely available would be impossible because these drugs are expensive to start with."

United Nations AIDS experts say that without effective steps to check the spread of the virus, AIDS could become as prevalent in India as in Africa, where many millions are infected. Experts say that by 2000, one in four HIV infections worldwide will be in Asia.

Bangladesh faces AIDS explosion

By Shakespeare Shil
Reuters

Bangladesh faces an AIDS time bomb with a dangerously short fuse, health workers say.

Complicity, sexual taboo, widespread prostitution and a booming backstreet trade in human blood may together be brewing up a catastrophe for the new millennium, they said.

Experts warn the number of cases could skyrocket in the Muslim country over the next few years.

Just over 100 people have officially tested positive in Bangladesh for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which leads to the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

But those working in the field say the true infection rate could be up to 1,000 times higher.

"Bangladesh is sitting on a ticking time bomb, ready to explode at any moment," said Nasir Uddin, a doctor heading a network of 200 organisations seeking to stem the tide of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

"If complacency cripples the force of action, an HIV/AIDS epidemic will ravage Bangladesh with a vengeance and land it in

a national crisis at the dawn of a new millennium.

"The cumulative number of HIV/AIDS cases... now stands at 105 and projections about undetected infection run from 20,000 to 100,000."

But in Bangladesh, where 120 million people regularly deal with natural catastrophes like floods and hurricanes, the silent spread of the virus has so far gone largely unnoticed.

The vast majority of carriers go undetected, because the stigma of AIDS is acute in Bangladesh where sexual matters are seldom openly discussed.

"HIV has touched the core of the population of Bangladesh and the experience of neighbouring countries suggests that only one to two years are enough to send the prevalence up to an epidemic level," said Nazrul Islam, secretary of the National AIDS Committee, which advises the government.

He called for a quick response, based on growing infection rates in neighbouring India, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand.

Poverty and a subculture of intravenous drug users also make Bangladesh fertile ground for HIV, experts say. Islam believes sex is the main route of transmission as elsewhere.

About 100,000 Bangladeshi women are estimated to work as prostitutes. A study this year showed they had an infection rate of around 0.5 per cent this year, compared with zero last year, Islam said.

"Each girl takes four to five clients a day for unprotected sex in most cases, raising the spectre of a conflagration," said an official with Islam's committee.

HIV infection is especially high among one of the main client groups of sex workers — the country's roughly 265,000 truckers. But insisting on condom use is useless, says one prostitute.

"If I insist on a no condom, no sex approach with my clients, I will have to starve," said Halima Begum.

There are more than 5,000 intravenous drug users in the capital, Dhaka, alone. Roughly 2.2 per cent of blood samples taken from this group has tested HIV-positive, Islam said.

About 200,000 bags of blood are collected every year for transfusion in Bangladesh. Some 70 per cent comes from people who sell their blood, many of whom are intravenous drug users.

Blood is rarely screened for HIV due to lack of equipment.

The government has been negotiating with Denmark for a \$700,000 grant so 97

health care centres can get screening equipment.

Bangladeshis who have worked overseas make up more than one-third of the country's known HIV carriers. About 74,000 Bangladeshis go abroad to work each year. Many of the men use prostitutes and when they return pass HIV on to their wives.

The first confirmed AIDS case in Bangladesh was a sailor who died in 1990, and gave the virus to his wife. Prevention efforts date back 10 years, but to date have been low key.

Only 11 full-blown AIDS cases are officially known and six of the patients have died.

One health ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, questioned whether the resources to run a major awareness campaign were available or warranted.

A National AIDS Committee member said such attitudes could lead to disaster.

"Bangladesh continues to be a low-prevalence area, but most of the determinants for an explosive outbreak of HIV/AIDS epidemic are present," said retired Major-General M. R.

Choudhury, chairman of the committee's technical group.

"We all have to work together on a war footing."

Birthstone of Jan

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Researcher points out main areas of weakness in the tourism sector

INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE and unqualified tourist guides and cadres working in the tourism sector combined with weak comprehensive drive to promote Jordan tourism are all considered a factor delaying growth in this vital and important sector of the economy, according to a thorough study.

Prepared by Nisreen Barakat, a researcher at the Ministry of Planning, the study indicated that the average stay of a tourist in Jordan is only four days. "The tourist comes within a tourism package for the region as a whole and visits specific areas that have been oversaturated with promotional campaigns," she said. Barakat pointed out that tourism accounts for 50 per cent of the hard currencies entering the Jordanian market. She explained that 1.1 million tourists visit Jordan each year and that they spend about \$770 million which translates into \$698 per tourist. The researcher indicated that on average a tourist spends \$175 a day in Jordan noting that Israel earns a total of \$2.8 billion from tourism each year and Egypt a total of \$3.2 billion. Barakat said a tourist spends \$1,335 during an 18-day stay on average in Israel.

She stressed the importance of influencing tourists to stay longer in Jordan by at least 25 per cent, or five days instead of four days so as tourism income would increase by the same rate. "Influencing tourists to stay longer in Jordan requires higher spending on the tourism sector especially in fields of promotion and rehabilitation/training cadres."

Barakat highlighted in the study the weakness of Jordan's tourism transport which resulted from a consortium among the three transport companies. She explained that the consortium has eliminated competition and raised prices by 30 per cent without any justification. Moreover, Barakat added, the law which required a JD10 million capital for any transport company has cancelled the element of competition in the tourism transport sector and restricted it to a specific type.

She concluded by emphasising that the lack of clear information about the type of tourists visiting Jordan and what attracts them to Jordan is one of the most important elements that weaken the tourism sector (Al Dustour).

Government still unable to find mechanism to compensate treasury when customs are lifted on production inputs

THE GOVERNMENT is unable to reduce customs on production inputs before arriving at a mechanism to compensate the treasury for the loss of the revenue, Finance Minister Michel Marto said in an interview with Al Aswaj. He admitted that the Jordanian industry has been harmed and that it deserves support to be able to compete with products from other countries which exempt production inputs from customs.

"We want to exempt production inputs from customs but we must compensate the treasury through raising sales tax," the minister stressed. He said that upon reaching a mechanism for compensation, customs will be reduced on a number of products from 40 per cent to 30 per cent especially goods that are often smuggled such as electrical appliances.

Marto concluded that without reaching a compensation mechanism, the treasury will be losing JD55 million by lowering customs (Al Aswaj).

Consumer spending drives U.S. stocks up 16%

NEW YORK (AFP) — Wall Street owes thanks to U.S. consumers for helping drive the stock market higher in 1998 with little more than a hiccup from the global financial crisis.

The New York Stock Exchange's main barometer, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, was up 16.1 per cent on the year at 9,181.43 points, less than 200 points from the historic high it reached on Nov. 23.

This year's strong advance extended 1997's striking 23 per cent gain. But the world's premier financial market went on red alert over the summer when the Dow plummeted 21 per cent between mid-July and the end of August, before surging back 25 per cent in the last four months of the year and setting a new record on Nov. 23.

"The big surprise was the strength of consumer spending," said chief economist John Lipsky at Chase Manhattan.

The U.S. economy stayed on 1997's upward trend, growing at a yearly four per cent clip even as Asia sank into an economic crisis that also hit Russia head-on, and rocked Latin America.

"In November 1997 there was a lot of disagreement over the real impact of the Asian crisis," said Lipsky. "Today there is little disagreement over the fact that the U.S. economic growth and global growth is slowing."

Lipsky said U.S. economic growth, adjusted for inflation, could slide to one per cent in 1999.

But 1998 showed how robust the U.S. economy is, and how healthy its financial markets are.

During the summer's sharp correction, American investors did not pull out assets they had on the market.

Mutual funds with U.S. stocks registered a 16.4 per cent increase in asset value over the first 10 months of the year, taking them to a total \$2.65 billion by end October.

The health of the U.S. stock market comes into sharper focus when seen through the lens of the Standard and Poor's 500, which offers a wider view than the Dow's 30 stocks.

The Standard and Poor's 500 gained 27 per cent through Dec. 29.

By sector, high-tech stocks carried the day by gaining 39 per cent on the Nasdaq composite, where high-tech stocks dominate.

But financial analysts' greatest fear — which at the beginning of the year was inflation — is now deflation (sinking prices), as they watch the Japanese

scenario.

"We have a deflationary situation: companies have trouble raising prices, so the only way out of that is to restructure and (raise) productivity," said Larry Wachtel of Prudential Securities.

"And productivity lies in technologies and technology leads the pack. That is the whole scene of the new paradigm," Wachtel said.

Internet stocks are first to benefit from that "new paradigm."

America Online, the world's number one Internet service provider, watched its shares zoom from \$20-1/2 at the start of the year to \$160. Yahoo rose from \$29 to almost \$280.

Wall Street did not seem disturbed by President Bill Clinton's troubles and did not even blink when the House of Representatives voted to impeach him Dec. 19.

"The apparent continuation of the presidential impeachment process is an uncertainty for the market but it may not have significant negative impact unless the market perceives that it exacerbates the present slowdown in the economy," said Richard McCabe of Merrill Lynch.

Egypt says no gas talks under way with Israel

CAIRO (R) — Egypt's Oil Minister Hamdi El Banbi has said his country was not holding talks with Israel on possibly supplying it with gas.

"There are no negotiations under way between Egyptian General Petroleum Corp. (EGPC) and Israel Electric Corp. (IEC)," he said in a statement faxed to Reuters.

He was commenting on reports from Israel that negotiations between the state-owned (EGPC) and the state-owned (IEC) would start soon on Israeli imports of Egyptian gas.

Israel's national infrastructure ministry said Tuesday the minister, Ariel Sharon, "has decided to instruct Israel Electric Corp and government representatives... to immediately open negotiations with Egypt on the possibility of supplying natural gas by pipeline to Israel."

The ministry said in a statement Sharon took the decision after EGPC proposed in a letter to launch commercial talks.

The ministry quoted the letter as saying the talks would be with EGPC, IEC and Amoco Corp, which is

developing natural gas fields in Egypt.

"The letter says...the companies that operate in Egypt and EGPC must find markets and they can sell to whoever they want without restrictions."

In addition, EGPC will also give its backing to any agreement, Israel's Infrastructure Ministry director-general Jacob Katz told Reuters.

Banbi did not refer to any EGPC letter and Egyptian oil ministry officials said they did not know of such a letter. Amoco officials in Cairo were not available for comment.

Sharon said in November he was basing any talks with Egypt on the condition that Cairo gives explicit authorisation to suppliers to sell to Israel. Until now, Egypt has only said it would not bar companies from selling to Israel.

Katz said the EGPC letter had met Sharon's conditions. "The letter answers the requirements set by Minister Sharon," he said.

Banbi said foreign companies operating in Egypt were free to sell their output to any market and that they had

approached Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

"They got positive replies from these countries, except Israel, as Mr. Sharon has been insisting on preventing IEC from contacting the companies," Banbi said.

"The new development is that Mr. Sharon has allowed IEC to cooperate with the companies in this respect," he added.

He said Egypt is consuming its full share of natural gas output and would buy more from firms operating in Egypt for years to come.

Israel is planning to begin large-scale imports of natural gas in the year 2001 and sees next-door Egypt as a logical supplier. But talks have been delayed by political disputes between Israel and Egypt over Middle East peace moves.

IEC is expected to be the biggest gas customer and has been charged by the government with leading talks with suppliers.

Amoco says Egypt has 36 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves but believes it potentially has up to 65 trillion cubic feet.

Jordanian banks offer euro service

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

banks will also provide services in euro.

AMMAN — Trading in the euro starts Monday on the local market when Jordanian banks join the rest of Europe's single currency, bankers said Sunday.

"The Housing Bank is ready to open euro accounts for its clients starting Monday," said Ahmad Haboush from the Housing Bank.

The Arab Bank, Union Bank, Bank of Jordan, the British Bank and other

Officials and analysts said that the impact of the introduction of the euro on Jordan is very limited. "If the euro will affect Jordan at all, such influence will not be any different from any development that may take place with respect to the German mark or French franc," said Fawad Faneek, an economical analyst.

The Housing Bank also said it will start opening lenders of credit in the euro currency.

A.F.M TRADE Sunday, 03-01-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	214.000	210.000	-1.87%
ATL BK	1.730	1.640	-5.20%
THE HOUSING BK	2.770	2.740	-1.08%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.600	1.580	-2.50%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.740	1.650	-5.17%
JO. INVS & FIN. BK	1.470	1.400	-4.76%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.570	0.560	-1.75%

BANKS INDEX	276.400	POINT =	-1.89%
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INSURANCE			
JO. FRENCH INS	2.720	2.680	-1.47%
JO. GULF INS	1.530	1.610	+5.23%

INSURANCE INDEX	124.930	POINT =	+0.19%
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SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.480	1.550	+4.73%
JO. INTL TRADING CENT	0.270	0.270	0.00%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.830	0.820	-1.20%
ARAB INTL FOR INVS &	2.000	1.930	-3.50%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.100	1.160	+5.45%

SERVICES INDEX	109.130	POINT =	+0.12%
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INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.100	3.260	+5.16%
PHOSPHATE	1.510	1.590	+5.30%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.600	10.200	-3.77%
THE INO. COMM & ACRIC	1.270	1.210	-4.72%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.550	2.660	+4.31%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.210	1.220	+0.83%
GAR AL DAWA	5.050	5.100	+0.99%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	2.000	1.900	-5.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.350	0.390	+11.43%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.320	0.330	+3.13%
ROCKWOOL	0.280	0.290	+3.57%
NYT. CABLE	0.660	0.650	-1.52%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.190	1.220	+2.52%
UNIVERSAL MODERN INO	0.620	0.630	+1.61%

INDUSTRY INDEX	78.140	POINT =	+1.57%
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PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK (75	0.850	0.880	+3.53%
ARAB INTL TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIOAL	0.470	0.460	-2.13%
CENTURY	1.250	1.200	-4.00%
NAMCO	0.280	0.270	-3.57%

GRAND INDEX	168.48	POINT =	-0.97%
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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, MONDAY 4, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You're in a good mood, but you may feel pushed to your limit. Be patient a little longer. A friend is about to come to your rescue. Someone who's been difficult to boss around is going to become more congenial. Either that, or you will. Looks like you two are about to regain your sense of humour. It's about time!

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You may feel like you're dragging an anchor around with you today. There are complications every time you turn around. Things are longer than you expected. Your big opportunity seems to be slipping out of your grasp, but that's not necessarily true. Ride your time. Just do your homework, and relax.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Looks like there's a trip you and your sweetheart would like to take together, and you're getting sort of antsy to get started. There's one other thing you need to do to keep costs down. It requires a bit of study, but you know where to get the information. Put in the extra work and reap the rewards.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're generally diligent and cooperative, but you won't put up with an uncomfortable situation for long. Today, you might realise its time for a change. If your career is less satisfying than you'd hoped, turn up the heat. If you can document that you're doing more work, you might convince the boss to give you a raise.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Don't let your fun and games get in the way of your work. If you organise things right, you'll have plenty of time for both. If you're really smart, you'll let somebody else make up your agenda. Then all you'll have to do is check things off your list and get on to what you'd rather be doing.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) This is a good day for making changes to your household. You've been contemplating them for quite some time, but the need is becoming more pressing. Is it because you have something else you'd rather be doing? Planning is required to finish a chore you've been putting off, but go ahead. You'll be thankful later.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) With Venus, your ruling planet, going into Aquarius, you'll have lots of fascinating people to talk to. This condition could even light a spark under a drab and dusty relationship. You may discover something new about an old friend, which you previously only suspected. You can help your friend's creativity come out in a burst.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Somebody wants you to do one thing, somebody else wants you to do another. What's going to turn out best for you? You might as well figure out what's best for them too, while you're at it. They most often don't know, and look to you for advice. Hold back and contemplate just a little while longer.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You tend to have a short attention span, but Venus is going into Aquarius, helping you stick with a subject long enough to really understand it. That tones you down and keeps you in your chair long enough to get the material firmly embedded in your brain. This should make your life a lot easier, today, that's important.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Did you know that Capricorn is the sign of the entrepreneur? You're the one most likely to take a gamble and win. Over the next few weeks, you'll be thinking of lots of great schemes you could get into, especially involving other people's money. An opportunity that comes up today could be a big winner, so be watching for it.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You're feeling under pressure lately. Its like there's something you need to finish right away, but somebody else is preventing you from doing that. As long as you think its the other person's fault, you'll stay stuck. Accept responsibility and let the other guy off the hook. If you do that now, you'll probably win the argument.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're a very creative person, and right now you may get to prove it. You'll have to come up with great ideas, one right after the other, in order to meet the deadlines. You may not like working under pressure, but if you can prove you do it well, you might make a big bonus.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Kuwait Stock Exchange falls considerably in 1998

KUWAIT (AP) — Last year was disappointing for the Kuwaiti Stock Exchange, where the market index fell 40 per cent, the National Investments Co. said Sunday.

The index closed at 1,582.7 points at the end of 1998, down 1,069.1 points from the closing on the last day of trading in 1997, the company said in its annual report.

The report noted that low oil prices have affected government spending on projects that are carried out by the private sector.

The market performance also reflected repeated clashes between Iraq and the United Nations over weapons inspections, the last of which prompted the United States and Britain to launch air strikes in December.

Some 13.91 billion shares changed hands in 1998, down 59.06 per cent from 1997, according to the report.

The value of these shares fell 68.14 per cent to 10.48 billion dinars (\$34.70 billion).

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Dolphins beat Bills, Cowboys lose in Dallas

MIAMI (AP) — Trace Armstrong sacked Buffalo quarterback Doug Flutie and forced a fumble with nine seconds remaining, enabling the Miami Dolphins to hang on for a 24-17 victory Saturday and sending them to the next round of the American National Football League playoffs.

Shane Burton recovered the ball on Miami's 3 yard line and Dolphins coach Jimmy Johnson won in the post-season for the first time since his Dallas Cowboys beat the Bills in the 1994 Super Bowl.

The game was the first of two "wild-card" playoff games Saturday. Arizona upset the Cowboys in Dallas 20-7 later Saturday.

Miami's opponent next weekend will depend on Sunday's Jacksonville-New England game. If the Jaguars win, the Dolphins will play at Denver. If the Patriots win, the Dolphins will play the Jets in New York.

The Bills, who trailed 24-14, got a 33-yard field goal by Steve Christie with 1:33 left, then recovered an onside kick and drove 64 yards to the Miami 5 in 10 plays.

Flutie, on first down, pumped to throw once and then cocked his arm again, but was leveled by Armstrong, knocking the ball loose.

The Dolphins earned their first playoff victory in four years and beat a team that ended their season three times in this decade.

The Bills came from behind twice, but couldn't overcome five turnovers and 93 yards in penalties. Eric Moulds' nine receptions for 240 yards — an NFL playoff record — weren't enough, either.

Miami's Karim Abdul-Jahhar rushed for 95 yards and the Dolphins controlled the ball for 37 minutes thanks to scoring marches of 57, 66, 77 and 50 yards. Each drive took at least eight plays.

Flutie, playing in his first NFL playoff game in 12 years, went 21-for-36 for 360 yards and a touchdown. But, ahead 7-6, he threw an interception at the goal line late in the first half.

Cardinals 20, Cowboys 7: In Irving, Texas, Jake "The Snake" Plummer, who recently negotiated a \$29 million contract that included a

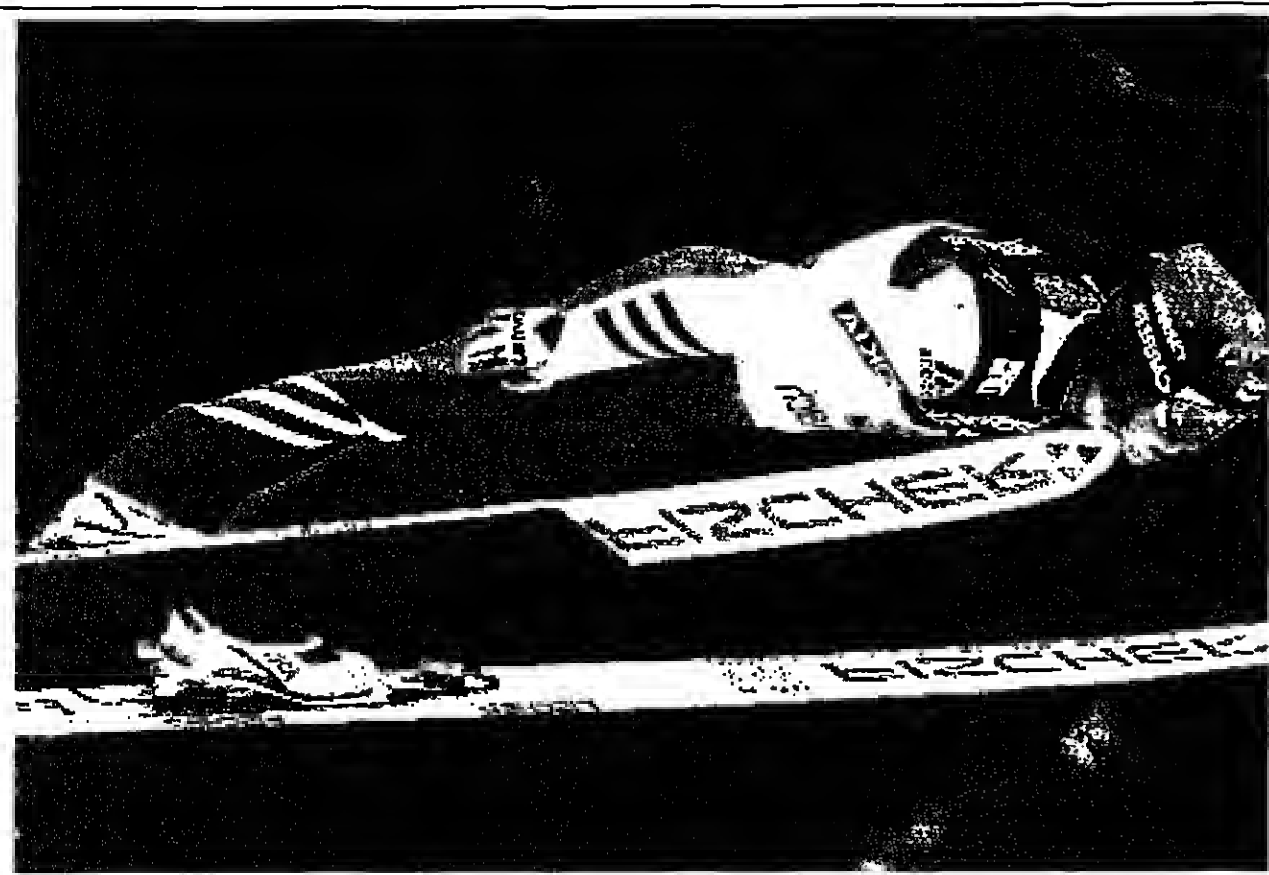
\$15 million signing bonus, threw two touchdown passes and led the heavy underdog Cardinals to their first post-season victory since 1947.

Arizona's low-rated defence stymied the Cowboys, who were shut out until the final four minutes of the NFC wild-card game.

The Cardinals, playing in the NFC playoffs for the first time since 1982, will meet the NFC Central champion Minnesota Vikings in the second-round next Sunday. Minnesota had the league's best record, 15-1, while Arizona was 9-7.

Dallas beat the Cardinals twice in the regular season but Plummer showed no playoff nerves in the third meeting.

Arizona, which led 10-0 at halftime, shocked the playoff-hardened Cowboys to start the second half on a 74-yard run by Adrian Murrell, followed by a 3-yard touchdown pass by Plummer to a wide-open Larry Centers. The run was the longest against the Cowboys in their 52-game playoff history.



Jaakko Tallus of Finland is airborne on his way to win the ski jumping competition during the Nordic Combined World Cup event in Schonach. With jumps over 92 and 92.5 metres he gained 250.0 points to lead the competitors field ahead of tomorrow's 15 kilometres cross-country run. Tallus won the ski jumping ahead of Czech Jan Matura and Norwegian Olympic Champion Bjarte Engen Vik (AFP photo)

Fernandez looking for 'springboard' to get back to form

AUCKLAND (AFP) — Former World No. 4 Mary Joe Fernandez said Sunday she was looking at the Auckland Classic as a "springboard" back to form from a wrist injury last year.

"I only played eight tournaments last year and I need a lot of matches to get back into form. This tournament is very much a springboard for me to get going again," she said.

The World No. 77 is drawn to face seventh seed and World No. 35 Chanda Rubin in her first round match Monday. The 27-year-old two-time Australian Open finalist and one-time finalist at the French Open, said her match against Rubin would be tough.

"She is a dangerous player and has a really big forehand. I will have to play my way if I am to win the match," Fernandez said.

Defending champion Dominique Van Roost said she was pleased to have avoided Fernandez first



Mary Joe Fernandez

"I really didn't want to play her in the first round because she is very tough," Van Roost said.

"It is going to be hard even without playing her first up because the cutoff is quite low and the quality of the players here has

improved again." The Belgian World No. 11 will face World No. 59 Rita Grande, of Italy, in her opening match.

Blatter favours World Cup revolution

GENEVA (AFP) — The World Cup should be held every two years, football's top official Sepp Blatter was Sunday reported as saying.

The proposed change would revolutionise the face of international football.

The Zurich weekly SonntagsBlick reported that Blatter, president of the sport's world governing body FIFA, backs a plan which would mean World Cups being held every even year.

Teams would qualify through continental rankings and qualifying competitions would be scrapped, the paper said.

Blatter reportedly favours continental championships being held in odd years with the leading sides on each continent advancing to a World Cup to be held the following year.

Blatter, who was elected FIFA president last June, said his proposals were a reaction to media tycoons across Europe, including Italian Silvio Berlusconi, who are pressing for a European super league of top clubs.

He said he was afraid that if the league went ahead clubs would be unwilling to release their international stars to national teams. A competition every two years would give national sides the "status they deserve," he said.

Blatter added: "I am demanding a clear statement: Do we want national teams or do we only want club football?"

Blatter said the World Cup was a proven success.

"The success of the World Cup is unique," he said.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

French sailors take grip on Around Alone yacht race

AUCKLAND (AFP) — French sailors were in almost total command of the challenging Around Alone yacht race which reached its halfway point here Sunday. Frenchwoman Isabelle Autissier finished third in the second leg here Sunday and in the process secured herself the lead overall. Organisers say that on total elapsed time Autissier now has a 5hr 57min 59sec lead over fellow Frenchman March Thiercelin and a 24hr 10min 19sec advantage over Italian Giovanni Soldini, who won the second leg. Jean-Pierre Mouligne of France is expected to arrive here early Monday to win the Class II section.

Dundee United ease relegation fears

GLASGOW (AFP) — Dundee United eased their relegation fears with a 3-1 victory at city rivals Dundee in the Scottish Premier League on Saturday. Goals from Billy Dods and Stevie Thompson inside the first 16 minutes put United in the driving seat but Dundee rallied as Shaun McSkimming pulled a goal back after 28 minutes. Brian Irvine smacked a header against the bar on the hour only for United to grab a third against the run of play 10 minutes later through Kjell Olofsson. The result meant second-from-bottom United closed to within a point of Dundee, a place above them. Elsewhere mid-table Hearts could only draw 0-0 at bottom side Dunfermline, while St Johnstone thumped visiting Aberdeen 4-1, helped by two second-half goals from John O'Neill. Leaders Rangers, who have a three-point advantage over Kilmarnock at the top, take on bitter Glasgow rivals Celtic at Ibrox on Sunday. Victory would put Rangers 13 points clear of third-placed Celtic.

Defending champion Fontenay leads in Paris-Dakar rally

AGADIR (AFP) — France's defending champion Jean-Pierre Fontenay won the special stage on the second day of the Paris-Dakar rally here on Saturday to climb to the top of the car standings. Fontenay, with co-driver Gilles Picard, was third overnight but had a superb day in the 654km run from Rahat to Agadir. Fontenay's Mitsubishi is now 1min 49sec ahead of Japan's Kenjiro Shinzuka following his win in the special stage, run over 99.5km in the Khatouat region, 130km east of Casablanca. Austria's Heinz Kinigadner, who has just had a year off, leads in the moto section. On Sunday, the 510km third stage from Agadir to Tan Tan has a 230km special.

Survey: Newcastle, Chelsea fans swear the most

LONDON (AFP) — Newcastle United and Chelsea have the fans with the foulest mouths in the English Premiership, it was reported on Saturday. A survey for the Sunday Mirror named St James's Park and Stamford Bridge as the top-flight grounds where visitors are most likely to hear swear-words and obscene chants. Researchers from the newspaper attended matches at every Premiership venue and ranked each one according to the amount of bad language they heard during a game and the coarseness of the swear-words used. Bottom of the paper's "league of shame" by a comfortable margin — was Charlton Athletic. A Newcastle United spokesman said the club was taking action over offensive language: "We have received complaints from fans about obscene and racist language. Anyone heard using it will have their season tickets taken off them." The Sunday Mirror's "league of shame": 1. Newcastle United, 2. Chelsea, 3. Everton, 4. West Ham United, Leeds United, Leicester City, 7. Sheffield Wednesday, 8. Aston Villa, Arsenal, 10. Liverpool, Derby County, 12. Manchester United, 13. Wimbledon, 15. Nottingham Forest, 16. Coventry City, Tottenham Hotspur, 18. Middlesbrough, 19. Blackburn Rovers, 20. Charlton Athletic.

Wiberg wins World Cup slalom

MARIBOR, Slovenia (AFP) — Swedish veteran Pernilla Wiberg produced a superb second leg to win the World Cup women's slalom race here on Sunday.

Wiberg, who was only ninth-fastest after the first leg, clocked a combined time of 1min 54.88sec. She finished 0.29sec ahead of Germany's Hilde Gerg with Ylva Nowen of Sweden third 0.49 behind.

Wiberg, a 28-year-old former world champion and Olympic gold medalist who was plagued by injuries last year, recorded her first triumph of the season in desperately difficult conditions.

The snow at the Slovenian resort was slushy and the rutted, humpy course saw several of the favourites struggle.

American Kristina Koznick, second-fastest after the first leg, made a mistake at the top of course and lost momentum, while Gerg held an advantage of almost two seconds over Wiberg after the first leg but skied too cautiously the second time and had to settle for second place.

On Saturday, Anita Wachter of Austria won a giant slalom race at the same venue while in-form Gerg took the Super-G bonours.

Chang likely replacement for absent Sampras

SYDNEY (AFP) — Organisers of the Australian Open leadup tennis event the Kooyong Classic have approached Michael Chang to fill the vacancy caused by the shock withdrawal of Pete Sampras.

Sampras stunned Australian tournament promoters when his management Saturday that he would not be playing in this month's Australian Open in Melbourne because of physical and mental exhaustion.

Colin Stubs, promoter of the Kooyong Classic, said Chang, a two-time winner of the event, was the original alternate player outside the eight-man field and he would be talking with the American over the next few days.

The Kooyong Classic, a round-robin event guaranteeing each player three matches on the Rebound Ace hardcourt surface, the same used for the Australian Open, has attracted a huge-casualty field from January 13-16.

The tournament features Andre Agassi, Thomas Enqvist, Tim Henman, Goran Ivanisevic, Mark Philippoussis, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Petr Korda.

The Australian Open gets underway in Melbourne on January 18.

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U.N. in talks to keep U.S., British staff in Iraq

BAGHDAD (R) — United Nations officials have held talks with Iraq to try to persuade it not to ban American and British nationals working for the U.N. humanitarian programme there, diplomats in Baghdad said on Sunday.

They gave no details of the talks, aimed at averting a new crisis just two weeks after the United States and Britain ended four days of air strikes to punish Baghdad for what they said was non-cooperation with U.N. weapons inspectors.

The diplomats said Iraq had told the United Nations it was concerned for the safety of Americans and Britons in Iraq after the raids, and would not renew visas for those currently in the country or give entry permits to those returning from leave.

Iraq has made no public statement and U.N. officials in Baghdad declined to comment.

Diplomats said Iraq's decision could affect 18 American and British citizens working throughout Iraq for the U.N. humanitarian programme, aimed at alleviating the worst effects of trade sanctions imposed for Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

But they said Iraq had already indicated some U.S. and British citizens would not be covered.

"They said the decision does not apply to two senior people who have one of those nationalities, and the secretary to a senior person," one diplomat said.

The United Nations has some 420 international staff in Iraq, based in Baghdad and in the three Kurdish-dominated northern provinces.

During the raids it withdrew most staff from Baghdad but left those in the north. The staff returned three days later.

U.N. spokesman George Somerville said another 19 staff were returning to Baghdad on Sunday from holiday. He declined to say whether they included Americans or Britons.

"These people are returning from their

leave," he said. "I do not envisage any problem with their return."

If Iraq does try to stop U.S. and British citizens working for the United Nations in Iraq it could prompt a crisis in the U.N.-supervised oil-for-food programme as the United Nations does not allow governments to dictate the make-up of its staff.

The programme permits Iraq to sell \$5.26 billion worth of oil every six months to buy humanitarian supplies for ordinary Iraqis living under the sanctions.

The main requirement for the sanctions to be lifted is certification from U.N. arms inspectors that Iraq no longer has weapons of mass destruction.

But since the bombing raids, Baghdad has refused to allow any further inspections until the sanctions are lifted. It views the oil-for-food programme as another method of maintaining the sanctions and has periodically threatened to end it.



FATEH ANNIVERSARY: Masked Palestinian activists belonging to the mainstream Fateh movement fire pistols in the air during a rally in the West Bank town of Salfit on Sunday marking the 34th anniversary of the founding of the Fateh movement. Fateh, begun by Yasser Arafat in 1965 when a few of his colleagues attempted to regain Palestine militarily, but changed its policy to support the peace process. Fateh is an acronym for its full Arabic name, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Reuters photo)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iranians to pray for rain

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's Shiite Muslim clergy called on people in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, to pray for rain on Monday, as many regions here still await crucial winter rains, the evening daily Eftekar reported Sunday. Congregational prayers for rain will take place in Qom on Monday morning at 9:00 a.m. (0530 GMT) with the participation of thousands of the faithful, it said adding that they would be led by Grand Ayatollah Nouri Hamedani. "Municipality and provincial authorities will take special measures to provide transport for the participants," the paper said. Iran, a country subject to periodic droughts, is currently suffering from insufficient rain and snowfall, especially in central and southern desert regions.

Pope visits Rome's garbage collectors

ROME (AFP) — Pope John Paul II on Sunday paid a visit to trash collectors at a centre near the Vatican where they had built a large nativity scene. The pontiff, who visits the workers each year, was welcomed by Rome Mayor Francesco Rutelli, before repeating his New Year wishes to the city and its inhabitants.

Iran arrests bird smugglers

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian authorities arrested 11 bird smugglers in the south of the country on Sunday as they tried to smuggle rare birds out of the country for customers in the Gulf states, the official IRNA news agency reported. The arrested men had captured various birds in the southwestern Ramozmuz and Mahshahr regions, IRNA said adding police discovered a haul of 36 birds destined for illegal export across the Arab Gulf. Millions of migratory birds travel across the country towards the end of autumn, to spend the cold winter months in the marshlands of southwestern Iran.

Mediaeval sculpture found in Golan fortress

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli archaeologists have discovered a well-preserved Mameluke sculpture of a leopard at a 12th century fortress in the Golan Heights, the Department of Antiquities announced Sunday. Experts say it is the best example of its kind ever found in the Holy Land. Only two other sculptures of a leopard have been discovered in the area, one in Lod in central Israel and one in Jerusalem. The sculpture, measuring 1.5 metres by 70 centimetres was originally placed above the entrance to the fortress known as Nimrod's Castle, erected close to Banias at the foot of Mount Hermon to repulse the Crusaders.

Turkish police seize smuggled ammunition

ANKARA (R) — Turkish police have seized thousands of rounds of ammunition hidden in petrol canisters on a truck, Anatolian news agency said on Sunday. It said police acting on a tip-off stopped the truck on a highway between the town of Siverek and the southeastern regional capital Diyarbakir. Three men on board were detained. Police found large numbers of anti-aircraft, incendiary and armour-piercing rounds inside 20 five-litre petrol canisters carried on the truck. More than 15,000 Kalashnikov bullets and 21,000 other rifle rounds were also found. The agency said the shipment was thought to have been destined for the Mediterranean port city of Mersin.

Sudanese political parties to register from Jan. 6

KHARTOUM (R) — Sudan said at the weekend that it would start registering new political parties on Jan. 6 under a law restoring a multi-party system after nine years. Opposition parties have said they will not register under the new law, which took effect on Jan. 1 and reimposed the multi-party system abolished after President Omar Hassan Al Bashir seized power in a 1989 coup. Speaking on state television late on Saturday, party registrar Mohammad Ahmad Salim said at least 100 people could form a party so long as they were aged at least 18 and had no convictions in the past seven years for political crimes such as treason. Salim said it would cost five million Sudanese pounds (\$2,100) to register and parties may not obtain financing from abroad.

Zhirinovskiy meets with Qadhafi

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy expressed his support for Libya on Sunday after a meeting here with Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi. Libyan television reported Zhirinovskiy, who arrived in Tripoli on Saturday, also met with Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al Montasser to discuss strengthening relations between the two countries, the report said.

Ben Laden: Alleged embassy bombers are 'real men'

NEW YORK (AP) — Exiled Saudi billionaire Osama Ben Laden admitted in an interview released Saturday that he "instigated" the terrorist bombing of two U.S. embassies, and said obtaining weapons of mass destruction is a "religious duty" for Islam's defenders.

"Hostility toward America is a religious duty... I am confident that Muslims will be able to end the legend of the so-called superpower that is America," Ben Laden said in the interview in the Jan. 11 issue of Time magazine.

Time's interview appeared to be the closest that Ben Laden has come to admitting a role in the embassy bombings. He has previously denied any role in the attacks.

U.S. officials have indicted Ben Laden on charges of masterminding terrorist bomb attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania last Aug. 7 that

killed 224 people, including 12 Americans. He also is suspected in attacks on U.S. targets in Saudi Arabia and other incidents.

The United States retaliated 13 days after the embassy bombings with cruise missile raids on suspected Muslim militant training camps run by Ben Laden in northern Afghanistan, and a plant in Khartoum, Sudan, that was suspected of making nerve gas components for Ben Laden.

On Dec. 24, a Pakistani news agency quoted him as saying he was "not involved... but I don't regret what happened there."

In the latest interview, which Time said was conducted Dec. 22 at his secret encampment in Afghanistan, Ben Laden was asked anew about his role in the embassy attacks.

"If the instigation for jihad (holy war) against the Jews and the Americans... is considered a crime, then let

history be a witness that I am a criminal," Ben Laden said. "Our job is to instigate, and by the grace of God, we did that, and certain people responded to this instigation."

Asked if he knew two men in custody in the United States for the bombings, Ben Laden replied: "What I do know is that those who risked their lives to earn the pleasure of God are real men. They managed to rid the Islamic nation of disgrace. We hold them in the highest esteem."

Ben Laden said he knew one of the two, Wadi Al Hage, but had not seen or heard from him in several years. He said Al Hage "has nothing to do with the U.S. allegations," and implied that the second man, Mohammad Rashid 'Owhali, also is innocent.

"The fact of the matter is that America, and in particular, the CIA, wanted to cover up its failure in the aftermath of the events that

took place in Riyadh, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, Kampala — and other places. God willing, in the future — by arresting any person who had participated in the Islamic Jihad in Afghanistan," he said.

"We pray to God to end the plight (of the arrested men) and we are confident they will be exonerated."

As for U.S. charges that he seeks to acquire chemical and nuclear weapons, Ben Laden said, "acquiring weapons for the defence of Muslims is a religious duty... and if I seek to acquire these weapons, I am carrying out a duty. It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims."

To most questions, Ben Laden couched responses in religious terms. He said U.S. and British attacks on Iraq last month were part of a plot to help Israel divide,

enslave and loot the Muslim World. As for Somalia, where the United States has accused him of a background role, Ben Laden said, "God knows that we have been pleased by the killing of American soldiers."

While Time said Ben Laden seemed "eager to deny reports that he has cancer," it did not include any quotes on that subject in the published transcript.

He used a walking stick, reportedly because of a bad back, and sipped water from a cup because he was nursing a sore throat, he said.

The article quoted aides as saying Ben Laden's contact with outsiders was limited to radio and newspaper reports, and that he rarely uses his portable satellite phone for fear the Americans would use the signal to target his location.

Saddam says Iraq to fight violations of no-fly zones

(Continued from page 1)

The U.S. claims were designed "to calm Arab public opinion angered by the American-British colonialist aggression on Iraq," Saddam said. He did not, however, specifically deny that Iraqi air defenses fired first.

In both cases where U.S. planes attacked Iraqi air defence units in the past week, U.S. officials said the aircraft shot back after being fired on. Iraq claims four soldiers were killed in one incident and a farmer was killed in the second.

The U.S.-British airstrikes last month came after U.N. arms inspectors said Iraq was blocking their work.

Since those strikes, which targeted government and military installations, electricity cuts in Baghdad have increased from four hours to eight hours a day.

Iraq has said the extra cuts are due to a shortage in spare parts.

During previous major confrontations with the United States, Iraq has dismantled crucial parts of its industrial infrastructure, such as power plants, in anticipation of air attacks.

Security Council sanctions imposed against Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait — which set off the Gulf War — cannot be lifted until arms inspectors declare that Iraq has eliminated its biological and chemical weapons and long-range missiles.

In a further move to boost support in the Islamic world, Iraq sent a delegation to Iran last week to discuss the crisis.

The Iraqi group briefed the Iranians on the "American-British-Zionist aggression against Iraq and the importance of the unity of world Muslims in supporting Iraq's rights," Ajeel Jalal Ismael, the delegation leader, told the Iraqi News Agency on Sunday.

Ismael added that Iran has agreed to release another 1,000 Iraqi prisoners of war held since the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Israeli police arrest cult members

(Continued from page 1)

"My mother told me in August '96 that we have only 40 months left on Earth," the affidavit said. "My mother told me that if Kim Miller told her to kill me, she would."

The members of the Concerned Christians who vanished in October include members who are white and black, married and single, white-collar professionals and unemployed labourers.

They range in age from infancy to 68.

Miller is the 44-year-old former Denver resident who has said he's one of the final two witnesses prophesied in the Bible in Chapter 11 of the Book of Revelation. He claims he is destined to die in the streets of Jerusalem in the final days of December 1999.

Guesses as to the whereabouts of Miller and his followers range from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula to Toronto to Libya.

Some of the missing Concerned Christians

occasionally leave e-mail and phone messages for those left behind.

"The police will continue to work in every legal way possible to make possible freedom of religion and ritual in Jerusalem and in Israel, for all religions, in the year of the millennium," a statement by Yitzhaki said.

"However, it will act firmly against the attempts of extreme groups to block access to Christians in the year 1999," he said.

Freed Germans warn against travel to Yemen

FRANKFURT (AP) — Four Germans kidnapped by tribesmen in Yemen warned against travel to the Arab nation after their safe return home this weekend from nearly three weeks in captivity.

Ex-hostage Roswitha Adlung said she and the others were seized on a main street in plain view, and not in a dangerous neighborhood where travellers would be hesitant to go.

In an interview Saturday with the television station ARD, she noted that Germany's foreign office has failed issue a clear warning against travel to Yemen even though it has noted the "considerably high risk."

The hostages — three women and a man — arrived in Frankfurt aboard a Lufthansa flight on Saturday. Tribesmen kidnapped the four on Dec. 7, hoping to trade them for money to improve infrastructure in the region of Bani Dhabjan. The tribe released the four unharmed on Wednesday.

Germany paid no ransom money, officials said. The release came one day after a crisis involving a separate group of 16 Westerners held hostage in Yemen by Islamic militants. A hotched rescue attempt staged by Yemeni troops ended with four hostages killed.

Yemeni tribesmen have kidnapped scores of foreigners to win economic concessions from the government but generally free their hostages unharmed. The kidnapping of the 16 Westerners — 12 Britons, two Americans and two Australians — was the first such kidnapping in Yemen by Islamic militants.

Germany's envoy to Yemen, Helga Graefin Strachwitz, praised Yemeni security for negotiating the successful release of the German hostages. The negotiations were not conducted directly with the kidnappers but instead with sheiks and other dignitaries, Strachwitz said according to the Welt am Sonntag newspaper.

Nearly 1,500 roses fail to woo woman

VERONA (R) — Nearly 1,500 roses — the last one delivered on a horse — failed to persuade an Italian woman to go back on a decision to break off a marriage engagement. The Italian news agency ANSA said it all happened near Verona, the northern Italian city where Shakespeare set his tragedy "Romeo and Juliet." Alessandra had broken off her engagement with Roberto. Roberto decided to send her 1,480 roses — one for each day of the more than four years they were engaged. A florist — who pocketed some \$6,000 from Roberto's galleys but vain gesture — happily delivered the flowers to a restaurant where Alessandra was dining with her family. Then, on cue, Roberto arrived on horseback to deliver the last flower himself and make an impassioned plea to the woman he hoped to marry. Alessandra said "thanks but no thanks" and went back to her meal.

Have-not regions enjoy more sex?

TORONTO (R) — A national survey shows Canadians in regions with traditionally high unemployment and slower economic growth are having more frequent and better sex than their counterparts in the rest of Canada. The bedrooms of the nation are busiest and happiest in the four Atlantic provinces of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, but less so further west, according to a Southern News-POLL survey reported in the National Post newspaper Wednesday.

Atlantic Canadians, who generally face higher unemployment and fewer economic opportunities, lead all Canadians with a sexual frequency of 6.28 times a month, the study said.

Assad due to be reelected next month

BEIRUT (R) — Syria's President Hafez Assad is expected to be reelected next month, according to a poll conducted by the Associated Press.

Joseph statues freed after kidnap

BRUSSELS (R) — Nine statues of Joseph seized from Belgium by militant, single mothers have reappeared, Belgium news agency said. Some of the statues, which were returned to the public crisis Wednesday night, had been damaged during their abduction, although Michel Declercq, parish priest in Deertijk, said there was no deliberate vandalism. Belgium reported. The statues disappeared Monday night. A man left in some of the crisis said kidnappings were the work of the previously unknown Association for Conscious Single Mothers. The note called for the right to "self-determination (for women), to artificial insemination, to voluntary single motherhood, and to immaculate conception," Belgium reported.

Drunk drivers offered free cremation

PORT CHARLOTTE (R) — Florida mortician hoping to scare tipplers from driving drunk has extended a grim New Year's offer — free cremation for anyone who dies behind the wheel. The offer is good through Jan. 1 and includes a car, truck or motorcycle-shaped urn to hold the ashes, Bill Curran, owner of Forest Lawn Cremation, said Wednesday. The funeral director, who usually charges \$1,000 to \$2,000 for cremation, made the offer to draw attention to the perils of drunken driving.

Yemen will not join Commonwealth

YEMEN (R) — Yemen will not join the Commonwealth of Nations, a decision announced by the country's foreign minister.

The decision was announced by the foreign minister, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in a statement. Saleh said Yemen would not join the Commonwealth because it was not a member of the United Nations.

Governor seeks to legalise 'animal' lottery

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — Rio de Janeiro's new left-wing governor plans to tackle the city's powerful gambling racket by legalising its popular lottery based on zoo animals, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Anthony Garotinho hopes to cash in on the lucrative racket by distributing licences to current operators who have a clean police record and collecting taxes from them. "The animal game is going to be one more source of income for the state," Garotinho told reporters.

Abright hold

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

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Volume 24

Volume 24

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Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24

Volume 24